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ECHOES OF SPORT



BY

HILDA MURRAY

(OF ELIBANK)

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ECHOES OF SPORT



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MR. MACKENZIE OF OGD.

MY FIRST CAPERCAILLIE.

OF

THE

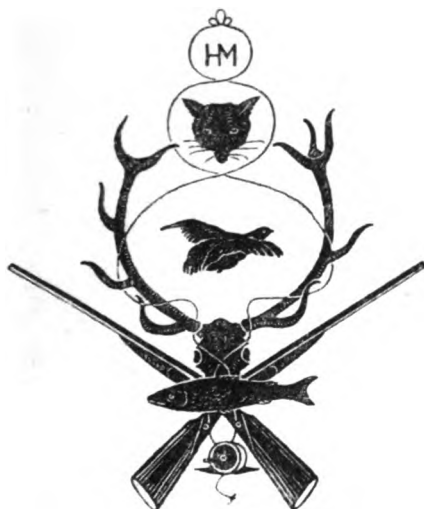
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ECHOES OF SPORT

BY

HILDA MURRAY

▪ (OF ELIBANK) ▪



WITH SOME ILLUSTRATIONS
BY FRIENDLY CAMERAS

T.N. FOULIS
London & Edinburgh
1911

Short

Second Impression

SK31
M85

TO
ALMA BREADALBANE
IN WHOSE KINGDOM AND COMPANY
MANY OF THESE HAPPY
DAYS WERE SPENT

*The Author is indebted to the Editors of
" Westminster Gazette," " Glasgow Herald,"
and " Country Life" for permission to
reprint in part three of the chapters included
in this volume*

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CHAPTER I
THE KEYNOTE OF SPORT

I

**"NOTHING is achieved before it be thoroughly attempted."—
SIR PHILIP SIDNEY.**

CHAPTER I

THE KEYNOTE OF SPORT

IN all the various branches of sport in which the heart delighteth I have often philosophised to myself to arrive at a justifiable reason for a never-ending fascination. There are some to whom sport may appeal in only one form, be it hunting, stalking, shooting, fishing, or what not, but it is to the more cosmopolitan sporting soul to whom I turn my philosophy.

To stalk a stag, to hunt the fox, to shoot driven grouse, whirring partridge, and rocketing pheasant, to tempt a salmon to hook himself on to a glaring fly, or play a fat trout on a gossamer web, each of these things demands a different set of nerve and eye, skill, daring, or patience.

Is the keynote therefore, the use and culti-

vation of any or all of these qualities ? Not to my mind—it is a simple rather than a complex keynote that lies at the root of true sport.

I must own to a love of stalking, hunting, shooting, fishing, and low be it spoken poaching in any form, for which my gentler sisters may blush for me, though I aver that the pursuit of such tastes has taught me some of the best lessons in life and some small store of natural lore. No one can pursue any sport satisfactorily without developing an acute sense of observation and a familiarity with some of Nature's big outposts, such as wind, sky, atmosphere, to say nothing of the myriad smaller details of colour, shade, covert, lie of ground and country. But even love of Nature and her ways is not my keynote.

What curious contrasts come to me as I write. A range of Scotland's greatest hills, rugged and stern, the first touch of winter on their heights, a little band of three struggling in the teeth of a stiff nor'-west wind, clothes heavy with snow and wet, sometimes crawl-



MR. MACKENZIE OF THE

THE REEL RUNS SCREAMING.

Photo by

ing, sometimes waiting in the shelter of a friendly rock for some tiresome hind or youngster stag to move out of the way of the larger quarry, at sight of whom all the cold and discomfort are forgotten, and whose lordly head on the wall will be proof positive of the sounding of the keynote.

The scene shifts. A blazing summer's day, great flimsy clouds here and there floating in a blue dome, the loch rippling with the laughter of a soft breeze, the gobble of a trout every few minutes, and a basket of several dozen ends an ideal day.

The rush of a mighty river, water black with the grip of frost, trees gleaming with hoar and snow, a human back and arms aching with the bend of the rod ; but there comes a blue and silver splutter at the end of the pool, the reel runs screaming, and when a glistening fish lies on the bank the keynote is again the same.

A stretch of green and brown country in the heart of England's Midlands ; one of those grey, soft days when the smell of the earth

must betoken scent, the music of hounds in a purpling covert or bristling gorse, a slim, tawny form slipping full split away. Soon your blood is tingling with the surge of galloping hoofs to the rhythm of which there is no equal on earth ; the best horse you have ever ridden stretching out beneath you strong and smooth with the manners of a queen, the neck and shoulders of a racehorse, "quarters to lift you smack over a town," and land you into the middle of the next field at every fence. When we come to finding the keynote that of hunting will be found to have an essential characteristic different from all other forms of sport.

The kaleidoscope turns again. In a clear September afternoon we take our way to the high stubble fields that flank the moor. The stooks gleam gold against the surrounding purple and blue of the hills. By a grey dyke we build ourselves a little zareba of heather and bracken, so that the birds shall fly unsuspecting over us for their evening meal of fat corn. Then we sit down and wait.

What a panorama of bird life is here. In the still air the distant "Go back, go back," of an old cock grouse, near by already in the stubble the "cheep-cheep" of partridges, confiding grey hens whirr over our heads, while their handsome lords the blackcock strut around dragging their white-rimmed wings against the ground, pluming and preening themselves with outspread tails, like so many vain peacocks and bubbly-jocks. In the far distance the lone note of the curlew cries like some wandering ghost of the moor.

The keeper boy, who has been stationed at the far corner of the field to wait till a goodly number of birds are busy in the stooks, now walks slowly towards them, and we in our zareba peeping through the dyke make ready to open fire as the scared birds stream back to the moor. Lucky you are if an old fat blackcock or one or two scudding grouse fall to your share. A patient wait for another half hour or hour, greed befriends you, the birds fly in again to resume their supper, and the game begins all over again. The sun goes

down, the autumn sky is alight with his last kisses, rose and golden cloudlets reflect themselves in the heather's royal glow, the moon comes majestically up over yon high eastern hill, the birds call and answer each other for miles around, and as the shades of evening deepen we turn our steps to the valley with the keynotes of Nature and sport singing a duet in our ears.

These are roughly-sketched pictures, each differing absolutely in surroundings, in attributes, and in qualities necessary for success, yet linking them together runs my keynote.

What is it ? Nothing more nor less than the attainment of one's object. What the object is matters little or nothing to the true votary, but what does and should matter is that it shall be attained. Therefore to compare one sport with another is futile, because each in its way is the best at the moment.

Shall I risk being dubbed a fool if I give a concrete example in asserting that the object matters not at all, only its attainment ? I have gone out with my deerhound to stalk

and course moorland hares, and my heart has beat as fast with excitement and tension as we crawled and crouched nearer and nearer the quarry, to give the dog the chance of a thirty or forty yards' start, as when I am going into the stalk of a gallant red deer ; and my pleasure is as great to bring home a well-stalked coursed hare as the biggest stag I have ever accounted for. I can only reason this out by my keynote. It applies to all the other forms of sport. Unfortunately the attainment in most of them involves killing, at best instantaneously. Here it is that hunting (especially fox hunting) has its different characteristic. To find your fox and hunt him is to the bulk of those who come out hunting as good an attainment of object as to catch and kill him. Now in all other sports the object is not attained unless the subject be killed—alas that it should be so!—but provided this be done as quickly and as painlessly as possible the odium of cruelty need not necessarily be incurred by the actual taking of life. The more difficult the attain-

ment the greater the fascination, and if a spice of danger can be added, like a pinch of pepper, then the joy is indeed complete.

It would be easy to wander farther afield, for this keynote is that of life, in work or play, whether sport or games, but time and space stand sentinels. The return of the most sporting time of year brings such thoughts to the surface, the promise of what the months as they unfold their treasures may hold for those who find their best pleasures in the worship of Diana and in the trumpet sound of the true keynote of sport.

CHAPTER II
A HARE DRIVE

" WHERE we least think; there goeth the hare away."—*Old Proverb.*

CHAPTER II

A HARE DRIVE

THERE had been a fall of snow. The hills and high ground were deeply covered. Then came a thaw for two days, wherein all the snow disappeared from the low ground, while the hills remained patchy white. A hare drive up on the " forest " was now declared possible. The blue or mountain hares were to be the quarry. Hardy animals they are, with their winter coats of fluffy white, trimmed with touches of blue-grey. Eyes dark and lustrous in their snow faces. Lovers of hills, fearless of cold. No true mountain hare seeks the shelter of the valleys, only the degenerate do so in the severest weather, and of those very few.

The morning was grey, mild, and calm. At ten the hour of starting, it was full of promise

of sunshine or threat of rain and mist. The balance was so even, it might have turned either way. The beaters numbered nine : three keepers, two shepherds, three underlings of sorts, and a forester. The number of guns three—My Lord, My Lady, and myself. My Lady had not fired a shot-gun for nigh on twenty years ; I had certainly not done so at a live object for five or six, except for a few shots at clay pigeons which I never hit. We both used the rifle often and to the point, but that was a different matter. To-day we each had twenty-bore double-barrelled guns, ample ammunition, and plenty courage and ambition. My Lord, being one of the best sportsmen in the British Islands, and owning more square miles of grouse moor and deer forest than most people own acres, need not have his shooting powers here described. Three collie dogs completed the party.

The place for the actual drive was high up on the open moor, or forest, beyond the big woods overlooking the house. Slowly we went up, leaving the green low ground soon

far behind. First into a big wood, where gradually the going became steep and white. Every step was into eight or nine inches of snow. The spruce boughs were laden, the stillness of the white mantle was unbroken, save by an occasional flap overhead of a capercaillie, or the scuttle of a rabbit in the undergrowth. It was a great Christmas-tree land. Not even the whisper of a far-off wind through the firs' snow-weighted branches.

By the time the little army reached the top, out into the open, the balance of the day had swung to the wrong side of its early morning promise. Not rain, but quiet enfolding mist. A grey cloak spread far and wide, veiling distance to little over a hundred yards.

Here the order was given to walk in line. My Lord took the fence side on the left, My Lady the right, myself in the centre.

The mist gave a dreamlike sense. So soft, so veiled, impenetrable, mysterious. It touched the whiteness of the snow with its grey hand. Dispelling time and space, it hid the beauties of distant hills and near moor-

land, jealous lest their secrets should be revealed to human eyes. The silence, too, added to the dream, as if it held the world in the hollow of its hand. Unbroken it was, till the "Go back, go back" of the grouse, or a faint human whistle pierced it like an arrow. Even the "pop" of a twenty-bore echoed with a deep voice not its own.

Nothing is so full of quiet life as a still January day on a Scottish moorland. The month should be January, which it was, for the feeling of winter's depth should be passed, yet it must still be winter, and only the far-away thought of spring in the heart. To complete the charm there must be snow on the ground. To trace the marks on it is to read the life of the moor's beasts and birds.

There are the countless runs of the mountain hares ; judging by the well-trodden path there must be hundreds of them. The smaller ones of the rabbits. Many claw tracks are there too, big and small. Occasionally in the snow there is a straight track of a pointed foot, divided in soft O's, is it the fox ? And

then, there is a well-known, well-loved mark, the "hall mark" of the forest, that of a dainty cloven hoof, that tells the haunt of the red deer is here also.

For two miles the three guns, flanked by the beaters, walked in line—the two twenty-bores encouraged by one shot, one rabbit each. My Lord, meanwhile, had bagged several white hares, and had it not been for the mist, and the danger of shooting anywhere but straight ahead, would have had a dozen or more.

The ground was like a switchback, up and down. The depth of the snow in places made the uphill heavy work. The mist closed in on the higher ground till the guns frequently lost each other, and could only locate their whereabouts by calls and whistles. Suddenly at a hundred yards' distance a shadow would loom on one side or the other, like a dark ghost on a grey background, a voice call out "All right," and the march forward would continue.

At last the "Pass" for the drive was reached. Most of the beaters had been lost

to sight for a long time. They were slowly coming round, driving the hares into a scattered belt of small spruce that lay below the ridge where the guns were to be posted. My Lord placed himself at the end of the triangle of the ridge. At a distance of two hundred yards farther round the hill, forty yards from the top, I was posted. Round the corner over the ridge, was My Lady. We were all safely out of sight and shot of each other.

The mist had lifted somewhat, it was possible to see a hazy few hundred yards.

I had taken up my position beside a dwarf spruce. It looked gaily green in the sombre light amongst the broken, white-patched ground. The brown and white held the foreground here in equal force ; the longer shoots of the old heather overtopping the snow, making a black-and-white piebald parterre. This made seeing white hares somewhat difficult for unpractised shooters.

There was not long to wait. Hanging my cartridge bag on a branch of the spruce bush, I filled my coat pockets with cartridges. The

head forester, in the character of my ghillie, had meanwhile been sent to the foot of the ridge as a "stop" to prevent the hares doubling back and to turn them upwards.

Imagining there would be some time to wait, I was slowly re-tying a bootlace when the first hare scuttled past. Out of shot before the little gun could get to the shoulder. The fun soon began. Another hare dashed past below me—one shot, a white fluffy body lay still. They came in a rush then between me and the top ridge. As many as seven and eight at a time, above and below. One white hare practically ran into me while I was firing at another farther off. There would have been work enough for a pair of automatic guns. Gently I swore in my heart that the little gun had been made before even ejectors came into fashion. Yet it did its work as well and fast as it could. The hares varied their courses a good deal. Some came lolloping along, stopping, looking about, sitting up, twirling their whiskers, then slowly on again, when some of them were stopped for the last

time. Others came full gallop, with ears well laid back ; some fell, a good many did *not*. In single file, along their run, came two, gallopers on each other's heels. "Bang!" the leader went over ; "Bang!" the second followed suit. "Right and left," smiled I.

Meanwhile from over the ridge came constant reports. The other twenty-bore was busy too. The boom of the big gun on the right came only now and then. The twenty-bores were having most of the fun. On the edge of the foreground, away to my left, a hind trotted by, looking big and dark against the mist. The stags passed within sight of My Lord.

When the beaters came up, the ground round me was strewn with many cartridges and a good few hares. A tall grey figure came into sight from her post. "Well, what have you got?" "Ten; and you?" "Seven." "Hurrah for the little guns!" We laughed like children, full of the best and purest enjoyment in the world, that of healthy outdoor sport.

Luncheon followed, where My Lady's stand had been, by a big rock.

In a few minutes My Lord appeared, bringing in his contribution to the bag. It made twenty-two hares altogether. Had My Lord been in one of the other two places, or even with either of the twenty-bores, the bag would have been nearer forty or more. But that is the fortune of war or sport or unselfishness, in giving your lady and your guest the best chances.

There never were merrier people than we three as we sat on the misty hillside with snow and white hares round us.

Another short drive of a belt of wood was suggested. This time the stands were in open spaces in the wood. A few hares came along. I got one. Luck singled me out that day.

That was the end. Each beater was given a hare, so all shared in the day's success. A swinging walk downhill off the rough ground on to the moor road brought us to within two miles of home. From there through the birch wood, where the mosses gleamed like emeralds

even in the fading light. Homewards into the valley where the great river runs.

We left the moor to its silence in the mist, but we carried in our hearts the memory of its charm and mystery.

Since then I have taken part in many hare drives on this moor with My Lord and My Lady and others, but though the bags have increased in number, even to over a hundred hares in the day, yet that first time stands out always as the best, with all its elements of sport and joyous companionship.

CHAPTER III
THE SURPRISES OF THE
HILL

"THE hills and the rocks are calling
With the wind, their passionate lover,
'Come up, come higher and higher
Where the clouds greet one another ;
Come up where the mists are swirling,
Come up from the valley and glen,
We will sing for you there a song
That is not for the haunts of men.'"

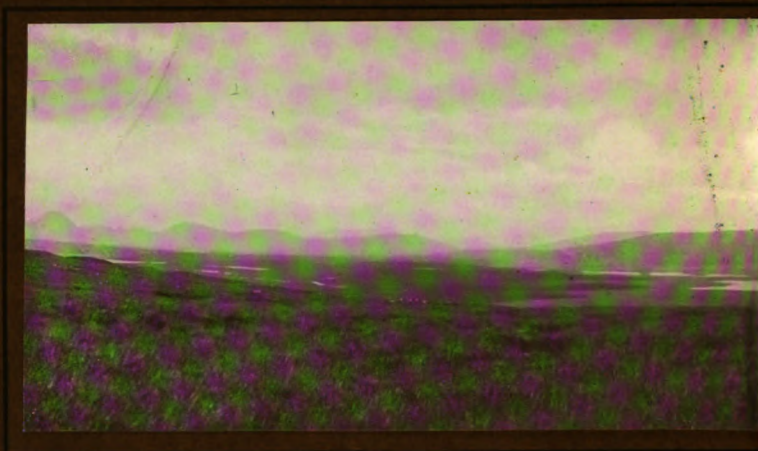


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STREAKS OF



THE HALL OF ONLOW.

SILVER LOCHS.

CHAPTER III

THE SURPRISES OF THE HILL

No one who has not stalked can have any idea of the infinite variety to be found in that sport. It is to the unending possibilities of adventure, to the probable happening of unforeseen events, that deer stalking owes its greatest fascination. A short account of a single day will amply illustrate this.

It was early in September, one of those ideal days when after several of storming wind and rain such as can only be in the West Highlands, the glass rises, the clouds sweep away, and a morning breaks, clear, calm, with a gentle west wind and a brilliant sun. The light was good, the wind was right, the rifle was target proof, and hope was high. What more could heart of man desire? though in this case it happened to be heart of woman.

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Five miles' drive to reach the ground, wherein was time to draw deep of the morning's beauty, to imagine bringing home the finest stag that ever was seen, and various other hallucinations of anticipation that surely are among the amusing attributes of sport. At the end of the five miles the stalker was met spying from the road, and with him an old white-bearded ghillie, who despite his seventy years, a bronchial cough, and rheumatic feet, could not be kept from the hill. He had been a shepherd in former days, and the love of all things wild is too deep planted in such hill-men to be effaced by mere weight of years.

"Good day, Dewar; how are you? You've got to take me to the hill to-day," and a long figure in the shortest of grey skirts jumped from the pony-trap to greet the stalwart stalker and the "old man of the mountain." "An' deed, me'em, I'm plessed to see ye," was the pleasant response. Then came the usual "Have you seen anything?" "Ah, weel, I wuss seeing some beasts further back," and so on. During this palaver Dewar pos-

sessed himself of the rifle and "boollets," old Campbell of the luncheon bag and strap-slung cape, the lady of her stick, and off they went.

It was an easy ascent, up an old bridle-path, the lower part of which is one of those historic roads made by General Wade, which are to be found in so many parts of the Highlands. Various spyings on the way up, but there was nothing to matter, and in about forty minutes they reached the top of a table-land, forming a large basin of ground, the heights above battlemented with black rocks, while straight ahead was one of the wildest, fiercest corries in the forest. No use now to ask Dewar if he had seen any deer. Eye and glass found them in every direction. The ground was thick with them; hinds on a stony rise to the right, but otherwise stags, all along below the ridge of the basin, under the black face of the hill. There were seven or eight on the skyline a bit more to the left, and the trio crept in and out of peat hags, up and down the knollies to get a nearer view.

Several pairs of horns were waving "clean," but the next move was to see their bodies.

The day, meanwhile, had touched the zenith of its perfection. The grey coat came off now, for it was all uphill work and only a whispering wind to temper the unclouded sun. But they were high enough up for a listening ear to catch that strange sound the wind only makes in the high hills, and it was partly to hear it again that this rifle had begged to be sent to this particular beat. She felt her pulses quicken as she caught the sound. No words can describe it, yet it is unmistakable ; a faint swishing and swaying in the grasses, more than whispering, less than rushing, as if the wind were singing softly yet strongly, close into the ear of earth as he sweeps from his strongholds in the rocky corries down into the world beneath. Full of tender caresses, yet making the air quiver with the strength of reserved passion. There is no sound like it in the valleys and low-lying lands, and none hear or feel it who cannot seek it out on the "high tops." It is the hill song of the wind.

A wait of two hours for these various deer to give a chance of approach, either by shifting their ground and feeding out of sight, gave the rifle an enchanted concert of her belovèd hill wind, filling her head with stores of wild songs till she thought it wiser to give a practical turn to events by sampling the luncheon bag.

What a day it was, to lie there in the sun listening and looking and spying—who would not rather go to the hill without a rifle than without a good glass for all the secrets and wonders, beauties and interests, it reveals? Great fleecy white clouds on a canopy of blue, range upon range of the greatest hills in Scotland ending in far Ben Nevis, the portals of Glencoe frowning close at hand, whilst away to the east the Moor of Rannoch shimmered a pale cerulean; and nearer, though far below, streaks of silver lochs gleamed here and there. Above, the sheer battlements of the black rocks, and close at hand several likely stags, and deer of all sizes and sorts dotted about in every direction. Dewar was beginning to

shake his head, Campbell to sigh deeply as was his wont. They had waited two hours, but as far as the stags in sight above them were concerned they might wait twelve. The beasts showed no signs of moving nor of relinquishing their point of full view and vantage, and there were too many deer elsewhere to try and circumvent them. "If Mistress M—— will wait here" (she had waited two hours, so it was nothing new), "I wull craal round and see if there is anything else." So away crawled Dewar, leaving Mistress M—— and Campbell still to wait. In less than twenty minutes Dewar "craaled" back again. "There is a bonnie stag with only two hinds near him," was the welcome report. A little farther on, and a circuitous route of peat bogs, knollies, gullies, and burns led them to within little over two hundred yards of him. Here Campbell and Dewar's dog were left to wait, whilst the stalker and the rifle took to their knees. It was an uphill crawl, the best heart-beating warrant known. The stag was lying (those lying stags, what

tortures of mind, what shiverings of nerves, of cold chatterings have they not been responsible for!) on a rocky, light patch of ground, the same colour as himself, above the stalkers, who had now crawled to within a hundred and fifty yards. He was flanked on either side by a hind, who stood alert, suspicious, restless, with eyes and ears full cock on those two motionless figures below. The rifle could not possibly get into position to shoot, there was nothing for it but to lie flat until the stag rose, and then there would be a scramble, a swing round of the knees to make a rest and a quick shot. The stag was asleep, so there was plenty of time to anticipate all the difficulties ; and to realise that suddenly the sunlight had gone and it was darkening more and more every moment. " I wish he wud rise, the light is gitting bad," whispered Dewar's soft voice. At last the stag woke, rose, stretched himself ; round swung the grey skirt, up went the knees, the rifle flew to the shoulder, the eye realised that the light was such that neither the top nor bottom line

of that yellow body were distinguishable from the background, but the brain said it was the only chance, and the trigger finger obeyed. The stag stumbled as if to fall, hit sure enough, but a step forward showed it was in the shoulder at the very top of the fore leg. The rifle was reloaded in a moment, but the stag turned at once tail onwards and limped away. Did a hit stag ever show anything but his tail ?

Then the reason of the waning light revealed itself. Suddenly and quickly a grey pall of mist enveloped everything, and into it the stag disappeared as if by magic. Hills, sky, foreground were blotted out ; the impenetrable cloak flew over ridge and hollow, leaving barely twenty yards visible around. The slight rise of ground on which the stag was lying had hidden the farther hills, and the stalker and the rifle had been so intent watching the beast and his sentinel hinds that they were only aware of the darkening sky, but the advent of the mist was concealed by the lie of the land. The stag vanished behind

the grey wall. Dewar whistled on his dog, which had been left a hundred yards behind with Campbell ; in an instant it too was swallowed within the folds of that vampire mist, followed by his master. Everything seemed to disappear, stag, dog, man, time, space and hope. There was nothing for it but to follow ; and the two remaining figures, the short-skirted, long-legged one leading, and the old shepherd, panting, begging to carry the rifle to lessen the "leddy's" load (to which, however, she sternly held), plunged forward too. The rifle's heart was as grey as the mist ; a feeling of furious despair had succeeded the first blank hopelessness. She heeded not the rough ground nor the extra weight of the rifle, but bounded on like one possessed ; conscious only of a determination to hang up her rifle on the shelf from henceforth if she had to return home and confess to another lost stag, for she had had a black day on the hill only the previous week (which day's tragedy was eventually retrieved by her, but the tale of the "Prodigal Stag" is

one by itself), and a wounded stag lost is the dark side of stalking ; if this were to be another, it should be the last—for ever. She was heading now slightly downhill, and had run some two or three hundred yards, when a faint sound borne upwards through the mist made her stop a moment. “ Let Mistress M—— pleesse to gif me the rifle now I haf my breath,” gasped the old man, who had been coming along best pace like the gallant hill-man he was, but blowing and rasping like a motor-car in distress. “ All right, Campbell ; I scarcely knew I’d got it—listen ! ” A moment’s silence, sickening in its length to straining ears, then the young, quick ones caught it, faint but sure, muffled through the mist—the dog’s bark. “ Come on, I hear the dog,” and on they went, down in the direction, guided by that beacon of sound. Farther on they came across Dewar, who had run on, and then waited to listen for the dog. The barks came now sharper, clearer. The mist was lifting a bit, and more foreground was visible. Once more the mists of despair

lifted too. "We wull git him shure enough." Silence again ; it needed not sight to see the scene ahead, the stag was still able to break the bay, but that sable dog was on his heels, staunch and fleet, and it only was a question of moments for another bark to snap out like a fog-signal. Bad ground it was over which to run fast, innumerable holes covered by long grasses, and hidden burns burrowing underground. "For Gowd's sake, mind the holes, me'em ! There wull be no sic hurry now, we wull haf him shure," besought Campbell's trembling voice, but "me'em" sped on, heedless of pitfalls, her long legs quick, her feet unerring, until they seemed appreciably nearer the blessed sound. The trio paused ; this time it was her eyes that were the first to pierce the mist's secrets. It was only a darker shadow on the pall, but it was enough. "I see him, Dewar ; there, down to the left !" She was right, the dog's voice said so. The race was over now, there was nothing but to creep cautiously nearer to get within easy shot ; but once more the stag

went bounding on, and the three followed ; not far however, for they soon came on him again at a bend in the big burn, his yellow body looming big and dark against the grey background, his head black outlined, erect, defiant. Within fifty yards now, down went " Mistress M—— " on to one knee, the rifle shook slightly after that wild run, but the eye was steady. Dewar called his dog off, the shot whizzed out, the stag bounded and disappeared over the rocky edge of the burn. " You've mussed him," muttered the stalker ; but the rifle smiled as she shook her head. " I don't think so," she whispered quietly. A few strides on, and there below, in a five foot pool into which a waterfall played from ten feet above, the stag lay floating, shot through the heart and drowned. " I sar the boollet strike a stone on the ither side, and I thocht Mistress M—— had mussed him," was Dewar's beaming apology. An answering smile was the reply. There are moments on the hill when words won't come, and the eyes that looked down into the pool borrowed the

reflection of the encircling mist for a moment, as she realised the wild relief of the end of the chase.

The men saw only a big old stag who had given them an exciting run, waiting now to be galloped and dragged down to where the deer pony was waiting below; she saw more, for that motionless body meant to her another free pass in the future to the sport on the hills she loved so well, the renunciation of which none but its lovers can fathom.

The rest of the day's work was quickly done, with many a laugh and word between the three, a sharing of the remains of the luncheon bag, and a health all round from the flask.

Such are the surprises that the hills hold in store for those that seek them out. A morning, brilliant with sun, a cloudless sky, ground swarming with deer, long waits on the sun-kissed earth with the whispering songs of the wind in her ears; then the quick stalk after a sudden discovered stag, the difficult shot, the sudden mist, the clouds of despair, the blind run, the dog's quickness, the re-dawn

of hope, and thus the triumphal end. But these are the things that make the hills weave a spell of fascination and allurement beyond all power of words, that bind the heart and memory to them with chains unbreakable that shall endure with life itself.

CHAPTER IV
DAYS IN THE STUBBLES

"Will ye gang wi' me and fare
To the bush aboon Traquair?
Owre the high Minchmuir we'll up and awa'
This bonny simmer noon.
While the sun shines fair abune
And the licht sklents saftly down on holm and ha'."
PROFESSOR SHAIRP.



Photo by

Mrs. A. A. Wolfe Murray.

READY FOR THE STUBBLES.

CHAPTER IV

DAYS IN THE STUBBLES

WHAT delightful hours these words recall and bring to the mind's vision !

Glorious afternoons in late September or early October, when the corn is partly carried, according to the late or early season ; when some of the fields are complete stubble, others are still dotted with stooks ; perhaps on the high ground the reaping machine is still at work, cutting a last strip of standing corn ; or if it be into October, the plough is snailing up and down the hillside, turning the golden ground to " brown of the fruitful earth."

One fears that the birds of which we have come in search, black game in particular, grouse and partridges thrown in, may be scared by the whirring machine or the plough, but little care they. Their supper to them is

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of first import, and familiarity breeds contempt ; they pay little heed to the silent workers.

There is a certain valley which springs vividly to my eye at the word stubbles, where I would bid you share an afternoon's stooking and stubbling with me. It is at the entrance to a wild sea of moorland among the hills of Tweed ; through it a road runs that leads over into the solitudes of Yarrow. A babbling burn scurries down it, curling and purling in haste to lose itself in the larger river, fringed here and there with birch and hoary alder, " the last that is left of the birken shaw."

The trees are still playing at summer this dazzling hot October day, and flaunt their shimmering green finery, though here and there the age of the year has touched them with his tell-tale brush. The heather on the hillside above gives them away, it has ceased to play at make-believe in St. Martin's summer ; its royal coat is exchanged for one of ruddy brown, patched here and there with gold of bracken.

Our small party of four leave the roadside down by the burn and climb up the hill of fields. The younger brother of the kind Laird who gives me these treats is my host to-day ; he is also my master of shot-gun lore ; we two are the guns, and the head keeper and his son are the beaters. They are to post themselves as sentries at the corners of the two stubble fields, one to the south-east, the other to the north-west of the dyke that runs as a centre line, dividing the two feeding grounds, up⁴ to the moor above us. When a sufficient number of birds collect in the fields, then the sentries will walk slowly across and drive them, as best they can, over us at our respective stands by the said dyke. Such is the plan.

There is a certain gate where four fields meet, two grass and the aforesaid stubbles, which my quondam host declares to be the usual flight of the black game coming in and out to feed.

“ I advise you to go there, but please yourself ; I am going to stay here ” ; and he lazily

makes his preparations to settle himself down, for hours maybe, to the north side of the wall, about fifty or sixty yards below the gate. Now he and I are on those most delightful terms, long past all the old milestones of politeness and conventional good manners, where the host proffers his best, which the guest accepts for fear of seeming ungrateful or unappreciative. We are on the better ground of true friendship, where one pleases the other best by doing what they each most wish. I know that "Maister Chairles," as the keeper calls him, having spread out his old coat to sit on, lit his pipe, and made his bristly Irish terrier squat beside him, will not take the gate stand were I at the North Pole, and so I too know I may please myself without seeming churlishly to refuse what he in his unselfish kindness chose to offer me as the best place.

He is a sportsman of many years' standing and experience, of infinite patience and powers of silent, immovable waiting, which I, the novice, can abundantly admire but cannot altogether emulate. He comes to the stub-

bles for only one object—blackcock. I come for two, the call of the moor and as much game as I can get. The gate stand is too tame for my restless spirit, and it is only three o'clock. I explain all this.

“Go where you please, and do what you like, and shoot what you can get—except grey-hen.” The last command, in a sterner tone, is a standing order. I don't require it, I know the rules of the game ; I only wish the grey-hen respected their side of it. Neither willingly nor wittingly do I ever shoot at the foolish creatures, but if they *will* come along with their black lords, or mix themselves up in covey of grouse close over my head, right in the line of fire, is it my fault if now and then stray pellets hit the tiresome birds ?

So I leave him with his dog and his pipe and up I go with my black spaniel Glossy towards the moor. It is there where the stubble flanks it that the grouse come in for their supper earlier than the black game, who mostly come from the moor the east side of the burn ; and we are on the west.

I am on the south side of the wall ; the field below, which my host commands, has still some stooks in it, but the high field to the north is already being ploughed. In its far corner, Lol, the keeper's son, is doing sentry, and no bird ever escapes his wonderful, young, hawk-like eyes, and he and his little water-wagtail spaniel are likely to have a busy afternoon.

His father has gone to the corner of the south field, away below me, and in direct line with the other gun.

The day was so gorgeous and hot that the birds were loath to leave the moor, which gave me ample time to thoroughly enjoy my first quest. I stretched out in the sun and watched the lazy clouds ; great white masses lumbering along as if they were too hot and idle to move at all. The hills to the north lost themselves in filmy blue, those to the south stood out in stronger relief, the road winding in and out, a shining thread, through their billowy green and brown. The air was full of quiet sound : far away the voices of

children by the burnside at the farm, near at hand the clank of the plough, now and then the grouse's call as they prepare to leave the moor at last, hunger overcoming sentiment. Somewhere near by "cheep, cheep" is twittering in the grass with promise of a partridge for the bag. Away in the valley a heron flaps lazily along, blue-grey against the tawny background, and now and then pigeons wheel and croon in the trees below.

Other days flit through my memory during the waiting hour. The very sight and touch of my twenty-bore brings my dear old father before me, who gave it me when I was only fourteen. It was his teaching of sporting lore that prepared the ground for so much of the pleasure and fun of later days, though the teacher has alas long since passed away. An ardent and keen sportsman himself, one of his chief interests was to give his children every opportunity of becoming the same. He taught me to ride, drive, fish and shoot, all before I was twelve ; and well do I remember my wild excitement and delight at shooting

my first rabbit at thirty yards with a pea-rifle out of the drawing-room window.

This was a favourite dodge of his, to pot the rabbits from the windows. He kept his silver flute and a pea-rifle in his bedroom, in the early morning he would gently open wide a window and play dulcet tones such as "Rousseau's Dream" and "Robin Adair," which he declared lured the rabbits out to listen to this modern Orpheus; the pea-rifle then took the flute's place, and poor bunny lay dead.

Other animals, two-legged ones, ran a chance of lying dead too; a boy cousin, one fine summer's day, fired at a rabbit from the smoking-room door, which gave on to the tennis lawn, when an instant after an itinerant photographer popped round the corner close to the rifle's muzzle. In fact, in those days Cringletie should have been hung with red flags like a modern rifle-range, for there was no knowing where a gun or a rifle might not go off.

Many is the time I have had pellets

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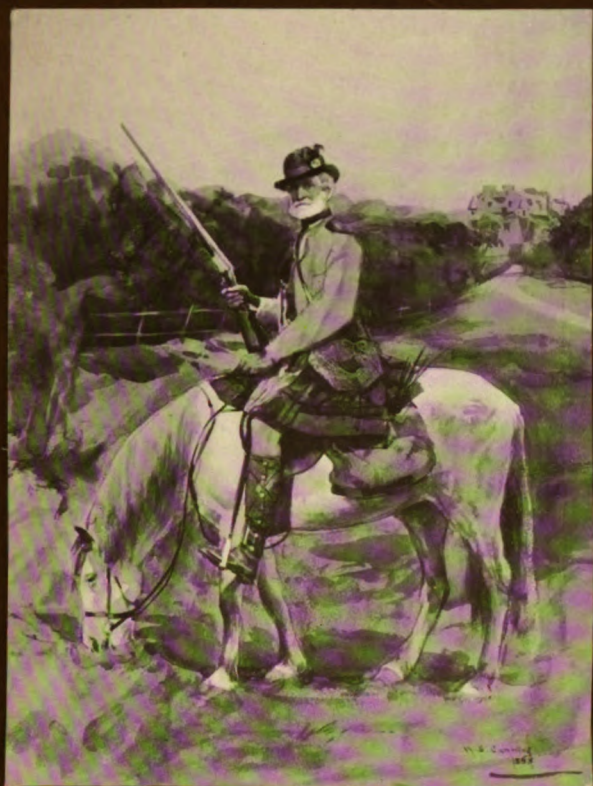
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From a Water Colour by

W. S. CURRIER.

MY FATHER.
THE LATE JAMES WOLFE MURRAY OF CRINGLETIE.

whizzing all round me, and leaves dropping on to me shot off just above my head when out with my father, as it must be confessed he did not add safety to his other shooting virtues ; a dangerous shot is however, a very good school for the young idea, and some of our luckyescapes may have made my brothers and me more careful than we might otherwise have been. My father certainly never hurt any one seriously, though he peppered most of his friends and neighbours !

“ Mr. Wolfe Murray wud shoot his gran’-mither if she war risin’ afore him,” was the comment of a keeper at some neighbour’s covert shoot when the order “ no hen pheasants ” having been given my father promptly shot three consecutively. His keenness certainly exceeded his caution, but for all that he was a fine type of the old-fashioned sportsman, preferring to go in search of his quarry rather than have it brought to him, as the fashion of to-day has, alas ! become to such a great extent. Mounted on his Russian shooting pony Moscow, who paid no more

attention to a shot fired from his back than to a tickling fly, he was a picturesque and handsome figure.

The small gun could tell of proud days also, when it has been honoured by kind friends at being counted as a "gun," occasionally in a butt, or at covert-shoots.

If there is one bird that defeats me more often than another, it is the driven grouse. He is on to you faster than any other, and so noiselessly. Most people probably give the palm to the driven partridge for speed and difficulty, but the grouse is to me far the worst of the two. Yet some of the days I look back on and forward to with the greatest zest are those after grouse, whether walking or driven.

What fun too have I and my twenty-bore had with the pheasants, and mostly those belonging to the good Laird on whose land we are stooking to-day. Great rocketing cocks whose flight is miles above my prowess to attain, yet now and then comes one somewhere within range.

There is something so satisfactory about a pheasant, from his guttural "cock-cock" and the splutter of his wings as he rises to the heavy thud when he falls. He is a generous bird, and gives full notice of his approach; if he gets safely past it's all your own stupidity and lack of skill or quickness. He cannot be blamed as a sneak, as the singleton grouse or partridge may, for whizzing by without any warning.

The sound of the pigeons in the trees by the burn brings back other scenes. An autumn evening high up on a wooded hillside, when the setting sun lights up with gorgeous splendour the gold and russet and grey of massive beech trees, the velvet of stately firs ; where the cushies come for their supper and their roost. There are myriads of them, and their flight is that of rippling, quiet laughter, that is like nothing else. Listening to it one forgets or forbears to shoot, for fear of breaking the spell and scaring away that wonderful sense of sound as it sweeps to and fro, making the air throb to our listening ears, the music

of wings overhead, with the low murmuring accompaniment of a mighty river far below at our feet.

Well would it be for these birds if they knew the magic of their sound, as in it lies their safety from me, for all that it recalls ; but when pigeon comes gliding in noiselessly by ones and twos, it is a different affair ; then my patience, that has kept me waiting an hour or two on a winter evening, either in keen, frosty air or in a driving sleet or rain-storm, demands its reward, and pigeon has to pay toll.

It is an absorbing occupation to wait and watch for any animal or bird ; above all as to do it successfully the watcher must be unobserved by the watched. To come to the stubbles without a small Zeiss glass is to lose half the interest ; part of the fun is to watch the birds through it. One learns much of their wonderful instincts and quaint ways, especially their unerring sense of danger at the slightest sound or sight of anything betokening the presence or approach of a foe, human

or animal. A blackcock and a wild duck will teach one more of the difficult art of stalking than any birds I know, and exercise one's patience and ingenuity sorely before one or other is put in the bag.

And now it is time to get to business, so a truce to further meanderings, though to remain up on the moor tempted me sorely ; but the field of the plough was getting black-speckled, so I hied me down to a likely seeming place for the birds' flight both in and out of the field. Luck certainly befriended me, for no sooner had I got into position behind the wall, ranged cartridges in rows on a flat stone in order to reload quickly, than a regular cross fire of birds began to fly near me. Lol of course spied my grey cap keeking over the dyke, and managed to drive a good many of the feeding birds straight at my stand.

The first to come was a big covey of grouse, and the fun began by two birds dropping to one shot. Then came a big old blackcock on his way to supper, which, alas ! for him, he

never reached. Soon after from the field quickly flew another to share his comrade's fate, a grand old cock whose deep sapphire breast gleamed in the strong light, and whose piebald tail will make a good cockade for some one's hat. So it went on ; birds seemed to fly at me from every side, some within shot and some without (of mine any way), some coming from the low stubble, put up by the keeper, the others coming from Lol's side, and some on their own.

Below me the other gun was busy, booming out, and my twenty-bore kept popping back its echoes. The climax of my luck was reached when a perfect swarm of partridges buzzed high and fast over me, and to my second barrel one fell a good sixty yards or more behind my stand.

All round me lay grouse and black game, the partridge bringing my total up to ten ; five grouse, four black game, one partridge, and every one of them driven shots. For once my little gun had not disgraced itself nor displeased me. "Maister Chairles'" bag

amounted to seven, mostly blackcock, and fine old birds too ; bringing our bag up to seventeen. A mysterious greyhen was picked up also, and though I honestly disclaimed all knowledge of it alive or dead, it being found within shot of my stand marked me as the innocent culprit. As usual I suppose, it had played me one of its silly tricks ; mixed itself up with grouse and come in for some stray pellets. However, my master was gracious to be pleased enough with my afternoon's work to pass the greyhen peccadillo gently by.

We wended our way home in the evening light, having added one more delightful memory of stooking hours to life's diary, and with the words of the old song singing to us—

“ O where hae ye been
This bonnie summer e'en,
And what have ye heard that was worth your heed ?
I heard the cushies croon
Through the gowden' aifternoon,
And the Quair burn singing doon the Vale o' Tweed.”

CHAPTER V
THE PRODIGAL STAG

**"The sun went down behind the hill,
The moor grew dim and stern ;
And soon an utter darkness fell
O'er mountain, rock, and burn."**

CHAPTER V

THE PRODIGAL STAG

PART I.—LOST

A BLACK day indeed! In outward appearances fair enough, but in results darkly tragic. A misadventure such as may happen to the luckiest of *shikaris*, a deception sufficient to take in the wariest of stalkers.

It was early in September, one of those grey, calm days that betoken equable weather; the wind was a gentle south-west, and all other circumstances were favourable. The beat was the easiest on the forest, across the loch to the south of the lodge. An old bridle-path leads almost to the top of the ridge, which is named the Ladies' Mount, and most suitably so, for it is a real ladies' beat, and after the wild high ground of the big

corries, quite a garden walk. Full of deer also, its grass being sweet and fine, and there are comfortable little rocky shelters where they can ensconce themselves when colder winds begin to blow.

Many a happy day have I had on that ground, and many a good stag too, even to three in one day, which event was the orgy of my stalking career.

There is something very satisfactory in getting a stag early in the day. Firstly, it puts one into good spirits with one's self and induces confidence; also if one be greedy, it gives hopes of a second.

I will not say before lunch, for nowadays, whether I get a stag or no, my "piece" usually is forgotten, or not required, till near four o'clock. What does one want with food till then after a good breakfast at half-past eight or nine o'clock, when one is out and up in the finest air in the world? *That* is the food for the hill, more wholesome and easily digested than any other. Also so long as one is on the tramp, and liable to have to climb

like a goat, the lighter inside the better. Stalking is like hunting in this way, there is no knowing what may not be required of one before the day is done. So my experience has taught me to defer eating and above all, drinking, as long as possible, except a mouthful at a burn as a great and rare treat.

On this day there was not long to wait for the first chance.

Just below the top of the ridge is a certain small rocky balloch, a favourite haunt of stagson that ground. Therewere several lying there, quiet and unsuspecting, with no hinds doing sentinel for them. We crept in very quickly to within a hundred yards. The best stag was slightly above us. After a very short time up he got, presenting an easy broadside target.

I was most comfortably settled behind a large boulder ; the light was good, the rest was good ; it seemed impossible to do anything else but shoot him bang in the right place, through the heart.

He fell at once to the shot, and lay for full a

minute and a half struggling to rise again. The stalker, one of long and varied experience, was quite satisfied it was all right. I believed his word and my own eyes, though, with rifle reloaded, nothing would have been easier than to have given the animal another bullet.

My rifle is one of Fraser's single .303 Velox, and a handier, surer little weapon it is impossible to have, nor would I exchange it for all the most perfect double-barrelled or magazine rifles in the world.

Then the day's tragedy descended. The stag got to its feet, stood for an instant tail onwards, as all hit stags invariably do, and trotted up the rise of ground, "over the hills and far away."

The other stags who were with him had disappeared directly after the shot.

At once Donald and his dog, the ghillie and I were in hot pursuit, but not one trace of that stag could be found by sight or track. The corrie to the north was apparently undisturbed, the face of the hill to the south still

remained quiet ; and deer dotted about in various directions quietly feeding or lying.

It seemed almost as if the beast were "fey," or had been only a dream, and the shot and its sequel a nightmare.

A few yards from where he had lain struggling Donald picked up a tiny tuft of hair and flesh, otherwise there was not a drop of blood anywhere to help to put the collie dog on the track.

We could only surmise that the bullet had hit him very high on the back, scruffing the top of it, as a stag thus hit always drops suddenly from shock. If he gets up and dashes off he is not supposed to be much the worse, as there is practically no loss of blood. But this is poor comfort to the disconsolate and shame-faced rifle, and that day's events have made me more nervous of seeing a stag drop very quick and then struggle up than any other antic he can perform.

Five mortal hours did we search that hill-side, back and forwards, up and down, to the north and the south, but in vain. Not only

was there no sign of our stag, but during the whole of our search no other deer seemed disturbed.

The charm of the day was gone for me ; the grandeur of the hills, the beauty of all the surrounding scenery faded from sight and mind. I had had a chance a child of ten would not have missed, and I had made a real mess of it. Far too sick at heart was I to even wish to try for another stag.

It is an accepted fact that no one would care for sport were it always successful. This is undoubtedly true, if for no other reason, that failure acts as a fresh spur to blot out the transgressions and the idioticities of the past, when non-success, as in this case, can be laid at one's own door.

Coming along the ridge for the last time, we found a tiny calf asleep, a little spotted thing, very small and backward for that time of year. It was quite tame, and not in the least frightened at being stroked. I longed to take it home, though a live calf, however pretty, is a poor substitute for a lost stag.

The men, however, did not seem to see it in the same light, so we left it to be retrieved by its mother, who was probably not far off. That evening my host said we certainly should have brought it in, as so late a calf was sure to die on the hill; therefore, if ever I find another, home it comes.

A little farther on we came across the most magnificent clump of white heather I have ever seen. It measured over a foot in diameter, and its white and green were really beautiful. To find it on such a day of ill luck was rather a mockery, though till I left the hillside and reached the Lodge, at the back of my Scottish, superstitious mind lingered the hope I might run across my wounded stag, but when night fell, and despair reigned, I vowed that never again should white heather be an emblem of good luck to me.

"All hurry comes of Satan," as the Easterns say; my impatience had to wait.

By the roadside "Long John" was standing with the pony and deer saddle. He was a great tall creature with one eye, and had

very little English. Sure of his kindly interest, I said, "Oh, John! I've done an awful thing; I've lost a stag!"

His gaunt face lengthened another foot, and he exclaimed in a hoarse, horror-struck voice, "My Gott!" Had I confessed to having shot Donald or the ghillie his tone could not have expressed greater consternation. Presumably the Gaelic mind invokes the Almighty as easily as do our Continental friends, but at that moment Long John's serious view of the situation did not seem at all out of place.

The one gleam of comfort was the sympathetic reception my tale received from my dear hosts, yet nothing could exorcise that vanishing form as I had last seen it.

There is nothing so depressing and haunting as a lost stag, and hard is the penalty one pays, and rightly so, for such blunders.

So ended the chapter of darkness.

PART II.—FOUND

"My heart's in the Highlands, my heart is not here,
My heart's in the Highlands a chasing the deer,
A chasing the wild deer and following the roe,
My heart's in the Highlands wherever I go."

Old Song.

Four weeks later I returned to the forest, and though I little deserved it after my late escapade, once more I was sent out on the same beat to try and retrieve my luck, again with Donald and the same ghillie.

To all my searching inquiries as to whether anything had ever been seen of the wounded stag the stalker sorrowfully shook his head. Neither he nor any of the men on the other beats had ever set eyes on him far or near. If the earth had swallowed him up he could not have more completely disappeared. Donald knew him well, twice he had been after him the year before, and each time the beast had got away unscathed by two respective rifles. He was besides one of his winter pets who came to the feeding. A nice head of ten points he had too. Donald declared

he would recognise him anywhere ; he had been constantly looking out for him, on that ground and elsewhere, ever since the fatal day early in the month.

However, the business of this day was to find another, and as the ground was full of them, and they were roaring in every direction, there did not seem to be any difficulty.

But it was a day when all things were right except the most important, namely the wind, and that was in the north-east, which meant we should have to go right to the very end of the ridge, if possible without disturbing any deer, and then work it on our homeward way.

O wind ! what power is yours on the hill ! How you hold us in the hollow of your mighty hand, be your breath gentle as a zephyr or fierce as old Boreas. Better a gale from the south or west than a sigh from the north-east on this ground. Worst of all, if your mood changes, and having counted on you from one direction you slowly back round till instead of laughing in our faces you grin over our shoulders behind our backs.

Anyway, this day the wind was wrong from start to finish, but remained so, which of two evils is the least as the plan of campaign is worked accordingly.

Various creepings and crawlings, spyings and waitings on unapproachable deer, brought the hour to past two o'clock.

At last some stags—a good way down the hill below us and impossible of access—for which we had waited over an hour, moved on, and for some unknown reason, except that an east wind usually makes deer restless, as it makes us humans on edge, began to go fast into the wind, round the shoulder of the beat and slightly upwards.

We three quickly followed, keeping well up under the ridge, out of sight.

An occasional roar as well as view helped us to cut the deer off, and eventually we reached the small rocky balloch of tragic story.

The stags that moved along had evidently picked up other friends, for there were plenty moving about the grey stones, though only small ones were visible ; but a big, deep roar

close at hand gave promise of something good.

Donald and I crept in behind a large stone to await events. Five minutes passed and no sign of the *basso profundo*.

"We will craal round the ither side," muttered Donald; but at that moment my eyes caught sight of the tips of horns like a ship's masts above the horizon, coming up towards us over a small ridge of rock.

"Donald, here he comes! Quick, let me in where you are!"

There was no need to tell me this was a likely beast, my own sense said that sure enough as the stag walked slowly in our direction.

"Tak' him when he stands," was all Donald whispered; but there was no standing, and he would have been out of sight if we waited.

I held the rifle well forward, and in another moment that gallant head lay motionless on the ground, shot through the neck at seventy yards.

There was no doubt about this stag, he never moved; but, remembering the mistaken certainty of a month ago, Donald rushed over to make sure by sticking him.

Then the truth that had already dawned on the wisely silent stalker burst on his companion.

"D'ye know, Me'em, whaat stag this is ? It is yer own stag : see here the auld boollet mark on the top o' his back."

To this moment I do not know what then happened, but I have a confused recollection of seizing Donald either by his coat, neck, or sleeve, shaking him like a terrier, and saying : "What, what ! Where ? It's impossible," in a voice quite unlike my own.

"I thocht it wuss him when I sar his heid, but I wud not speak for fear of putting Mistress Murray off."

Wise, thoughtful man, for which my grateful thanks went out to him more than he knew.

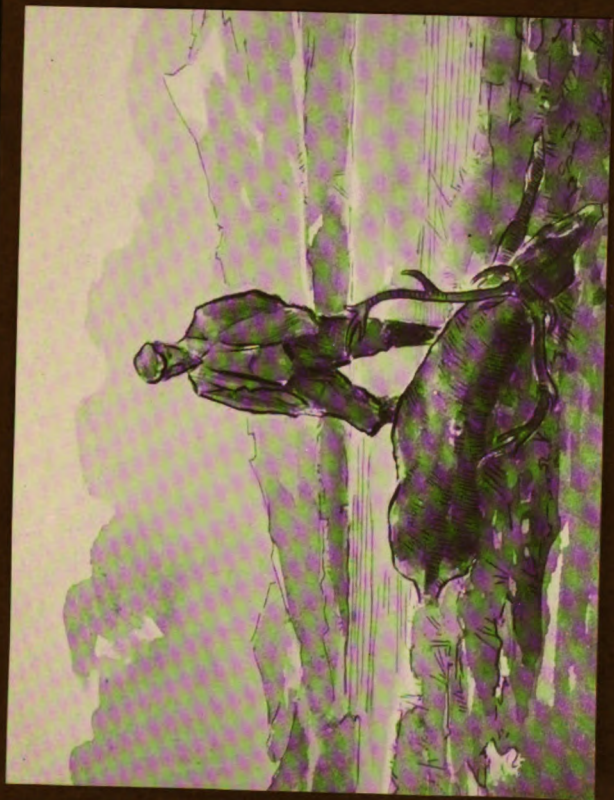
When my senses recovered, and I could once more see and hear properly, the evidence

was conclusive. Besides the head with the ten points the stalker knew so well, there was a dry scab formed on the top of his back the size of half a crown, covering the place where the bullet had scuffed it. He was apparently none the worse, though perhaps a little gone back in condition, but as he turned the scales (clean) at well over thirteen stone, there wasn't much the matter with him.

Where he had gone that first day and after will always be a mystery. Donald concluded he must have slipped very fast down the south side of the hill, crossed the river, and remained the other side till he had recovered sufficiently to return to his usual haunts.

It was indeed the truth when I told Donald I would rather have got that stag than twelve others of twenty points each, and by the way his handsome face lit up I believe he fully shared my pleasure.

How much one owes to these good friends of the hill for the way they enter into the joys or disappointments of one's sport. How careful they are of one's safety and comfort.



From a sketch by

Miss L. Louisa Jones.

THE END OF THE PRODIGAL STAG.

Many a long wait, sometimes in biting cold, is beguiled by exchange of ideas with a stalker whose knowledge of natural lore, of ways of the deer, and many other entrancing subjects, can be an unending lesson of delight. There is no greater gentleman than a true son of the hill, and as a friend and companion he is hard to beat.

We were a happier trio on our return to the Lodge that night. Every one had to be told in turn (poor souls !) of the wonderful end of the Prodigal Stag, who had been lost and found by the same rifle and the same stalker within fifty yards of the same spot after an interval of four weeks.

In this adventure I indeed touched the zenith of my stalking luck.

Since then white heather is again a fetish.

CHAPTER VI
FISHING—I.

"We may say of angling as Dr. Boteler said of strawberries :
'Doubtless God could have made a better berry, but doubtless
God never did,' and so, if I might be judge, God never did
make a more calm, quiet, innocent recreation than angling."—
ISAAC WALTON.

CHAPTER VI

FISHING.—I

FRESHWATER

A KALEIDOSCOPE of days dances before me, some of them vivid, some of them hazy, but all of them happy.

I doubt if any other sport brings such rest to the mind as fishing. Its very environment tends to this. The music of running water from the gentle, limpid English stream to the fierce roar and swirl of a Highland river, the deep purling notes of Tweed and other Border streams, or the rippling lights and wavelets of a loch ; all conduce to that peace of thought that wipes out time and space, and bears you like driftwood down the flow of hours.

Fishing has a twofold charm, the act of fishing and the act of catching fish. The first

is with you the whole time and independent of the second. If it is on a river, the delight of knowing where to fish, studying the eddy of the stream, the beginnings and endings of pools, the holes by big stones where a fish is likely to lie, casting the line that it obeys your slightest wish,—these joys are yours every moment, and even the disappointment of a slender or empty basket cannot banish them.

The day's fishing that comes always foremost to me was that whereon I caught my first salmon. It was on a river in the wonderful forest of Blackmount. There had been a spate the preceding week, and on the Monday the river was pronounced to be in perfect order. The lady of the forest, herself an experienced hand at fishing and other royal sports, as all who run may read in her fascinating book *The High Tops of Blackmount*, equipped me with rod and tackle and all the necessary paraphernalia. Accompanied each by a ghillie, we left the Lodge about 10 a.m., and pulled across the loch to where the river leaves it. There are five pools in a stretch of

a mile of water. I and my ghillie were left at the top pool, the other rod going farther down. It was agreed we should meet at the third and best pool for luncheon, to compare notes.

As I had once or twice tried for salmon in an almost fishless river, I had handled a salmon rod, so the 15 ft. one lent me was not altogether a new weapon in my hands. The river was in such perfect order that standing out on the stone jetty it did not require a very long line to cover the pool. I had on the good old Jock Scott, and I had not been casting more than twenty minutes before *splash, rrrrrrr, bump*, the last noise being my own heart against my ribs. I can feel it all now, at the distance of fifteen years, the rush and swirl of that first salmon, my pulses keeping pace with his runs. The ghillie, a fine fisherman, knew that a novice was at the butt end, but being a man of few words he gave me only such instruction and advice as did help and did not fluster me. "Haud up the pint o' the rod." "Let him rin." "Reel up now and

git off the pier," and so step by step I got back, or stopped, according to the fish's say in the matter. In ten or twelve minutes from the first scream of the reel a nice salmon of fifteen pounds was on the bank. How hot and happy I was, firstly at my luck, and secondly that I had not foozled my first fish.

Before long I was into a second—he too came to land all right. The next pool provided me with a third; and so laden and radiant I joined my hostess about two o'clock, to find her equally successful.

After luncheon she wound up her day by a fourth, weighing 27 lb., while I brought up my total to five. It was indeed a record day (nine salmon), and that five of them should be a novice's start was enough to make anyone a confirmed fisher for life. My back and arms ached that night with a vengeance, but the joy of heart and mind compensated for any pains of body.

Two days later I returned for a short time to the only fishable pool on the river in a storm of wind and rain, and with my faith-

ful Jock Scott pulled out another sixteen pounder.

Since then many a good salmon has fallen to my share out of those pools, both with fly and *garden fly*, the latter which I for one count to be the most dexterous art of the two; but that day of sunshiny September years ago, the threshold to me of a life's friendship and so many happy days, stands out like a high peak in a range of beautiful hills.

A year or two after this famous first time, I got the heaviest salmon I have yet caught, out of the same river. He weighed 27 lb., a great old fish with a mouth like a shark. It took me fifty minutes to play and land him, and before the end I wondered which of us would die first.

Were I asked to define the different pleasures of salmon and trout fishing, I would say, speaking for myself, that I delight in catching salmon but I prefer fishing for trout. The labour and physical fatigue of salmon fishing are so much greater that one requires the stimulus of success as encouragement;

whereas the art of fishing for trout is so much more delicate and subtle that it is a joy in itself, and therefore not altogether so dependent on result.

If my luck wedded me to salmon fishing, it is to trout fishing that I really give the palm ; and there again, it is to the wonderful lochs and rivers of that same forest—and elsewhere in their owners' other possessions—that I owe such royal days.

Some years ago the lady of that western kingdom and I picknicked for a fortnight in July among its wonders and beauties. In ten days we two accounted for fifteen salmon and a thousand trout.

We would start away in the summer mornings about nine, taking luncheon and tea with us, to one of the lochs. We would begin fishing about eleven, and with short intervals for food we would go on till seven-thirty ; returning home when the long shadows were falling in the beautiful northern twilight that knows no night. Our baskets varied from ten to twenty dozen, which last was our record.

Trout fishing on a loch is very delightful, but its charms are slight compared to that of a river. In that same salmon river how many happy hours have been mine with a trout rod. Its foamy rapids and rushing, rocky stream make finding trout lies almost a science ; only here and there in its whirl of waters, unless they be very low, is it any use throwing a line ; the play of a half, three-quarter, or pound trout on a ten-foot rod in that river is as proportionately exciting as a salmon on stout tackle, and a two pound trout is equal to a forty pounder. Usually bright-coloured flies are most attractive in those waters, grouse and red, teal and green, butcher, Alexandra, woodcock, or teal and yellow proving very destructive ; though it is my humble amateur opinion and experience that if trout are on the rise and take they will come to any fly in reason, and that it is size far more than colour that matters.

What summer evenings have I spent on one of Scotland's mightiest rivers, thanks again to the goodness of the same owners as

further west. Flopping fat trout, gold and black, that take the fly with a run, and scare you half to death for fear the tackle won't hold. I am not ashamed to own there have been tears of rage and disappointment in my eyes before now when a monster has broken me.

One pouring wet morning a summer or two ago I ran out to the river, close behind the house, for a short time. The water had been very low, the only chance was to wade out to some stones from where one could fish a certain bit of rough tumbling water. Out I went, and in less than half an hour I had landed four trout weighing nearly three pounds. When I showed them to the head keeper, than whom a keener fisher does not exist, I fancy he thought I had stolen a march on him to have had all the fun to myself and not even let him net them for me.

From Scottish rivers and lochs my kaleidoscope turns to English streams and ponds. The clear translucent stream when the Mayfly is out, and you must crawl on hands and

knees as if you were stalking a sentinel hind, then throw your fly, light as a zephyr if possible, just above the fat trout's nose. That too has its charms, in the sweet-scented hay meadows ablaze with green and gold. Fascinating it is to watch the real and the artificial Mayfly float down the water where the green-brown shadows gleam and sparkle, and look at you like soft dark eyes.

The first time I ever fished in a chalk stream was in Wiltshire, in those entrancing water meadows near the wonderful Downs ; a far remote, old-world spot, that stands to me an idyll for all time.

The day was one of light breezy June, with a soft southerly wind that waved the water upstream and made fishing for a dry fly ignoramus comparatively easy, else I should never have brought home five beautiful trout, weighing about four pounds.

The stocking of ponds with rainbow trout has added another joy to fishing treasures. Two small ponds in the Midlands, it is my good luck to know, have given me some very

good sport, and many a happy summer evening have their owner and I spent by them.

The rainbow has a method all his own ; he is the quickest grabber at a fly and the strongest diver and jumper in my limited experience. Living as he does in very still waters, in these ponds one is obliged to use fine tackle and small flies. Sometimes I have known the air of a lovely calm evening rent quivering and blue with the language at the butt-end when "The brute has broken me." Once the very waters seethed, lashed by the point of a rod driven out of all self-control for a moment in a frenzy of despair at losing what is always the biggest fish ever hooked.

It would be interesting, were it possible, to have the aggregate weight of all one's lost fish. The proverb "there are as good fish in the sea as ever came out of it" should be changed for fishers to "there are heavier fish in the sea than ever came out of it."

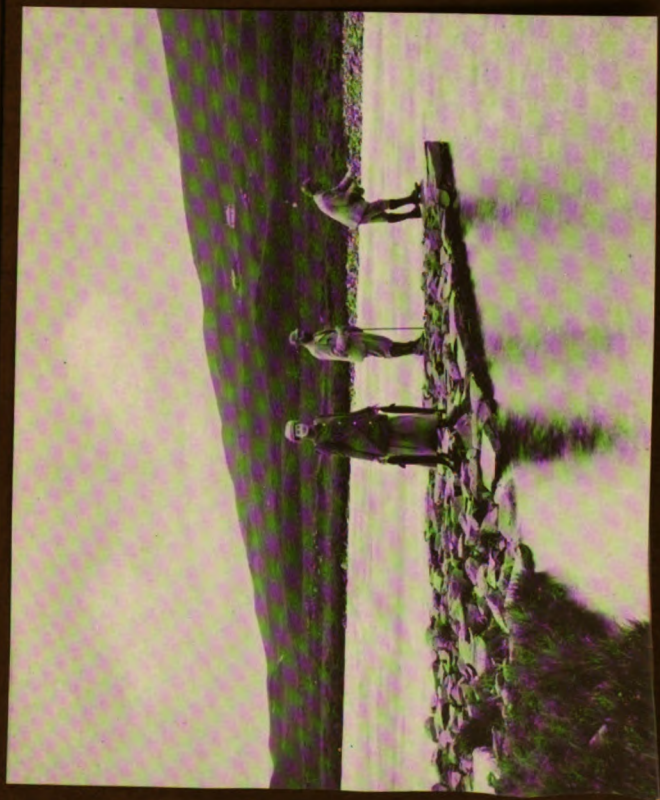
These trout are beautiful fish, scaling anything from one to four pounds, deep in girth, and shimmering like veritable rainbows. I

have them in a tiny pond in the Lowlands, fed by a hill burn, where they do well and are greedy beyond words, as the following story will show. One morning in September a big rainbow broke the worm tackle with which I had hooked him. That evening I landed a good one, also with worm, which proved to be my friend of the morning, as coming out of his mouth was the broken gut and right down in his stomach the hook. Besides, in his lip was a March brown fly hook which, according to a note in my fishing book, must have been there since 24th June. A fish with a fly hook in his mouth, a worm hook in his stomach, ready to continue to gulp down bait, must surely be quite impervious to what we mortals call pain. I may add I have a truthful witness to this event, and it is not the usual fishing lie.

Worm fishing in hill burns is another very fascinating ploy, more perhaps for the charm of surroundings, among the hills and heather, the call of the grouse and moorland birds, than for the actual result of the basket. Certainly there it is quantity more than quality

that counts, as a burn trout of a fifth of a pound is a whale. There is a certain amount of dexterity required if the burn be narrow and the water clear. For any chance of success you must keep well out of sight, swinging your line gently upstream, pop into the pool ; if thrown too hard it flips off half the worm. Nice pink little worms must be used, well cleaned and scoured, for such the greedy burn trout love, and will be tempted by even the remnant of a tail.

If the burn be a wider one, and not cut up into stepping-stone pools, it is very good fun to fish with tiny fly. One such burn I know, with too historic and literary a fame to name, the owners of which amuse themselves on summer days, when no lordlier sport is to hand, in seeing who can make the biggest basket in an afternoon. Competition waxes keen ; the Laird himself has been seen crawling on hands and knees behind the alder bushes, flipping out small trout (so-called) by the dozen. Woe betide the luckless fisher who mindful of his country's laws, dares to throw back the



The Lake of Omid.

TWINS.

Photo by

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veriest minnow. Here indeed, it is only quantity that matters. A hundred and five I believe is the record basket for an afternoon's fishing in this burn. Perhaps the less said of the species of fish caught the better, nor would it be wise to hint at the locality of a famous river to which this burn pays tribute.

If any amateur fisher like myself wishes to study some very useful lessons of fishing lore, both with fly and worm, they cannot do better than read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest a small book called the *Practical Angler*, by W. C. Stewart. He lived before the days of dry fly fishing, but he practised its chief principle, namely casting upstream, and says it has so many advantages in trout fishing that he wonders any with pretensions to make good baskets do not do likewise. The last few years dry fly fishing has become a great fashion on Tweed, and many fine catches are made in this newer way. I have often wondered whether success on this particular river is not more owing to the fact of fishing up-

stream than to the dry fly itself, as most wet fly fishers cast downstream.

As yet I have not mentioned the crack fish of all, sea trout. There is nothing to touch him for real liveliness, for silvery beauty, or for delicacy of flesh. I would rather fish for him, catch him, eat him, than any other fish that swims. As far as the first two preferences go I have not had the same chances as with salmon and other trout ; the biggest sea trout that has yet come to my basket has not been more than a pound and a half, and four in one day the highest number, so hope still lures me on to greater things with these princely fish.

Here my kaleidoscope of fresh-water fishing comes to an end. How much I owe of health and happiness to some of the days here recorded, how grateful I am to those good friends who have so often placed such days within my reach, I could never tell. The hills of my Northland are inexpressibly dear to my heart, but the second place is unreservedly given to her rivers and waters.

CHAPTER VII
FISHING—II.

" THE innumerable laughter of the sea waves."—ÆSCHYLUS.

CHAPTER VII

FISHING.—II

SALT WATER

THE first time I ever did any sea fishing was in the sounds of New Zealand. It is a good many years ago now, but I remember hauling up many strange monsters of the Antipodean deeps off the sides of the Governor's yacht, or out of its dinghy. Cod and haddock, or things like them, we caught in numbers, and my most vivid recollection is that of brilliant pink fish called trumpeters. Thus far my memory goes of the sport of those far-away seas, amid splendid scenery of mountains whose lower slopes were like ferneries, impenetrable with luxuriant semi-tropical vegetation.

The last two years luck has given me another chance of sea fishing on our own north-

western coasts, both with rod and handline, thanks to a generous friend who put a fine ketch of a hundred and twenty ton at our disposal for a fortnight's cruise each year. There is something peculiarly fascinating in the western seas of our Scottish coasts, whatever the weather be. Indeed, one must see them in all their moods, from resplendent sunshine to wildest storms, to be at one with the surroundings. What more exhilarating than to be on a magnificent sailing yacht as she scuds before a good breeze on a sunny day, the waters flashing round her, sapphires set with diamonds? Like a great white bird she skims along, full of buoyant life, the crew nimble as cats among the ropes and spars, the skipper shouting stentorian orders from the wheel, and handling his craft with a scientific precision that fills us land-crabs with wonder.

Another of yachting's delights is seeing so much of the night. As long as it be not pouring with rain, the deck is one's sitting-room, and a good fur coat keeps out the cold. The



Paint by

Mrs. INGEL.

THE IRIS.

masts and rigging stand out in graceful lines against the grey sky which in these northern latitudes never comes to black at that time of year. The little beacon light glimmers up forrard, filling the mind with visions of Viking ships of old, and many other dreams. Then it is that this north-west country of ours lays hold on heart and senses, drawing its child close to itself with all the magnetism of the north, setting its seal on you with wild sweet kisses, its splendour of sea and hills, its varying moods, chaining you to itself with fetters that will bind you from the uttermost parts of the earth. The song of the western wind is that of the Siren, and when once your ears have heard her in duet with the sea you will never be free again, but wind and sea and hills of the west have claimed you as their own for ever.

But I must not be tempted to dilate on the joys of yachting in western waters, for that is a theme of its own.

In the first cruise our northernmost point was Gairloch ; to me the most beautiful of

all the west coast bays. It has everything : splendid hills, rugged and bold in outline, a foreground of feathery woods, a wide sweep of sea, with Skye in the distance rising like a "vaporous amethyst." The very name of Gairloch brings sea fishing to mind. Last year we fished for saithe on lovely September evenings, either from the yacht or from the dinghy. The rise usually came on between six and eight, and the long bamboo rods, with white, yellow, and red flies on each line, gaudy as the dressed yardarm of a ship, would be kept busy flipping fish into the boat, whilst the deck of the yacht forrard was as slippery and scaly as a fishmonger's slab with fat saithe, wriggling mackerel, and codlings flopping all over the place.

This year, not being quite such novices to the varied pleasures of yachting, we devoted even more time to sea fishing. Unfortunately when anchored in Poolewe, famous for its whittings, such a fierce nor'east gale raged for twenty-four hours that no fishing from small boats was possible ; though we had

some very good fun with handlines over the side of the yacht, and a good mixed catch of flounders, codlings, and small "haddies," whilst I added a hermit crab to my lot. He was in a shell about four inches long. We kept him as a curiosity for a few hours down in the saloon; his expression when put into a basin of salt water after a couple of hours on the *terra firma* of the shelf that ran round the walls was extremely quaint and interesting. The poor thing was evidently very thirsty, and opened and shut his mouth to lap up the water with great gusto. He was exactly like a very old, cross Humpty Dumpty. Thinking it cruel to keep him, we returned him to his sea home. What tales he must have told the mermaids and fishes of his strange adventures among the mortals.

Gairloch treated us more civilly than Poolewe, and on a beautiful afternoon we went far out into the Bay in the electric launch. The skipper, two of ourselves (the yacting party was two men and two women), our two maids—who had become keen and

expert sea fishers—and one of the crew, “Malcolm,” to work the engine ; five hand-lines in all.

What a fishing that was. For three-quarters of an hour I never had a blank draw, and generally two haddocks at a time. No sooner did the plumb touch bottom than *one* nibble, *two* nibbles, then haul up as fast as one could, and long before the cross-bar reached the surface you saw one or two wriggling forms; and so it was with each of us. They were mostly “haddies,” varying from half a pound to one and two pounds. Now and again we got some whiting, and a gurnet or two with their prickly backs and owl-like expression. One’s arms got quite stiff, and one’s hands hot inside and cold out with the run of the line and the sea-water. We used mussels for bait, and bits of raw herring also.

One great tragedy happened. My companion suddenly exclaimed, “I’m either pulling up the bed of the sea or a whale,” and evidently a great weight was on her line.

She hauled and pulled till at last an enormous fish appeared. "It's a giant saithe," exclaimed the skipper, and dashed to the rescue to help her pull it into the boat. Just as the brute's head was over the gunwale the hook broke and it slipped back into the sea. So exhausted was it however, with its journey of fifteen fathoms upwards, that it lay floating on its back, maddeningly just out of our reach. Alas! we had neither gaff nor even boathook. The skipper struck it with an oar to further stun it; Malcolm tore at the anchor and started reversing the engine to try and back down on it, but just as he got the anchor up, the fish gave a recovering wriggle, rolled over on his stomach and disappeared, followed by our wails and howls of rage and disappointment. He must have been about ten pounds, reckoning it modestly for a "lost" fish.

We fished altogether for an hour and a half, and our catch was 168 fish all told: 154 haddies, 12 whiting, and 2 gurnets. None of us will ever forget that afternoon's sport

of the sea. Then back to the yacht, and after tea we two Dianas of the rod jumped into the dinghy, after saithe; but they were not much on the rise, and we only got a few, not enough to compensate for the loss of the giant of their race.

How very rarely, if ever, can one eat a fresh fish from a fishmonger's shop; certainly I have never tasted any bought haddock or whiting comparable to those one catches one's self; even twelve hours after they are out of the sea, for a breakfast next morning they are fresher than any shop-bred fish.

Our next sea fishing was an evening in the Narrows, at the north end of the Sound of Sleat, where the tide races like a mill-stream, out into the sweep of Glenelg Bay. The two men of the party had left the yacht at the Kyle of Lochalsh in the morning, but we two were determined to see the cruise out and sail back to Mallaig, from where we had started two weeks before; also we were set on the saithe at Kylereea, of which the skipper had told us great tales. It was not a propitious

evening, the clouds and mist were low, and it was grey and rainlike. Luckily for us sea fish did not seem as sensitive to the elements as their fresh-water brethren.

Thinking we should have better fun with trout rods, we each tied the big flies on to the line, for anything as delicate as gut would be wasted on saithe and lythe. They certainly gave us capital play, but in a short while after landing several pound fish, when I discovered the top joint of my precious split-cane rod was nearly bent double from the fish's diving propensities, we returned to the more clumsy but stouter bamboo rods.

To watch a shoal of saithe on the rise is really a sight ; they literally boiled round the boat, and every cast meant a rise and generally a fish. In less than an hour and a half our catch was fifty-five saithe and two lythe, and we and our two boatmen, true sons of Skye, returned to the yacht with the dinghy ankle deep in fish, thoroughly pleased with ourselves and our last evening's work at sea.

How the heart travels back to those

joyous days, surrounded by Scotland's beautifullest and best; the magic of the North drawing one close to herself, the cares of a restless world far away; a deep content into the very roots of being, a memory of *bien-être* to remain for ever.

One other experience of sea fishing comes back to me. A far different scene, in the land of Italian skies. To the east of Genoa is a small old fishing village, where I once spent some quiet weeks. As the spring came on, and the nights grew warmer, I used to go out after dark with my friend Cecco the boatman, in his fishing barque, spearing fish. In the prow of the boat was a large brazier filled with pine kindlings, which flared and blazed, lighting the water for many yards around. It was like looking into dissolved emeralds and aquamarines, clear, translucent, into which fishes shot or quivered like dark flaws in the glittering jewels of the sea.

We were each armed with a trident, or rather spear with six or seven prongs. I amused myself mostly practising at station-

any objects such as sea anemones, shellfish, or limpets on the rocks; but Cecco would mark down a fish, the spear would rive the water like lightning and reappear with a wriggling form on the prongs. How he did it remains a mystery.

To me the delight was enough to be out on the sea in those starlit nights, the soft winds caressing one, the sentinel pines waving on the headland above, the smell and crackle of the flaming brazier, and the gentle lap of the waters as the boat glided through their sparkling sheen. That was my pleasure, and Cecco's prowess was his.

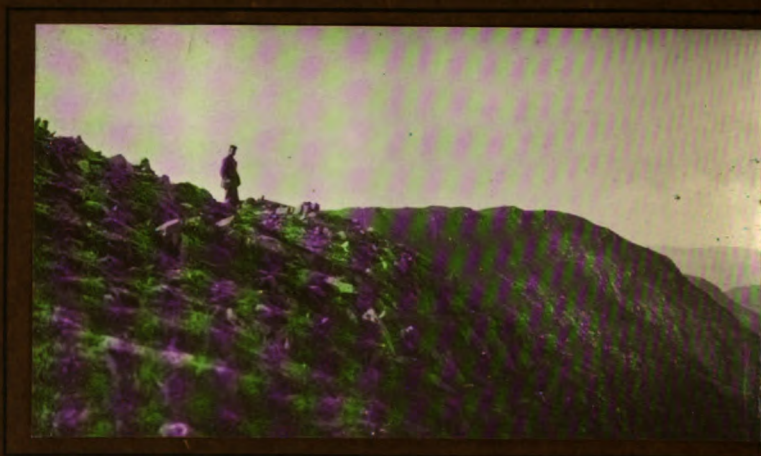
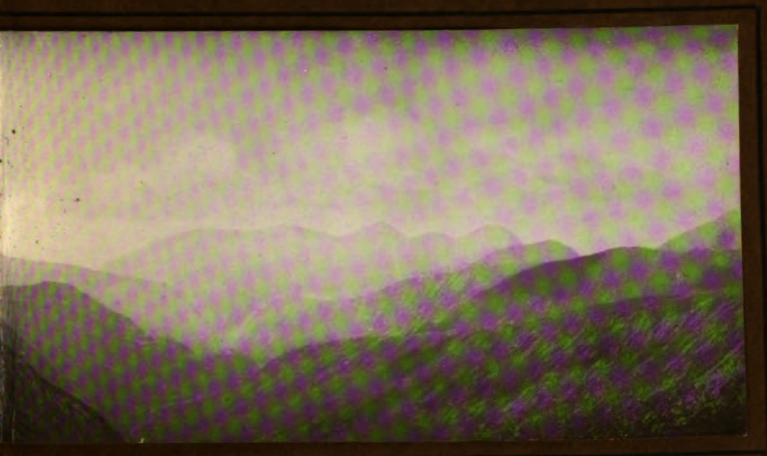


Photo by

RANGE UPON RANGE OF THE



THE EARTH OF ONSLOW.

GREATEST HILLS IN SCOTLAND.

CHAPTER VIII
A DAY AFTER PTARMIGAN

**"But on and up where Nature's heart
Beats strong amid the hills."
RICHARD MONCKTON MILNES.**

CHAPTER VIII

A DAY AFTER PTARMIGAN

OCTOBER was speeding towards his third week, stalking was over, but my heart was still set on a quarry of the high hills,—to add the wild ptarmigan to my bag for the year.

As usual I was given my opportunity on the magnificent forest in the west, where many days of happiness and royal sport have been mine.

It was a fine quiet morning, the wind in the south and little of it.

A small party of three started about half-past nine to make for the high beat behind the Lodge, a much favoured haunt of the ptarmigan.

I with my twenty-bore gun, Donald the old head stalker, also with a gun, and Cameron another stalker. With these, my two favourite

henchmen, I felt sure of success. A pony was pressed into the service, and carried me the first few miles, out towards the west, then northwards along a burnside, till the steep path was reached on the western ridge of our beat. By a quarter to twelve we were on the top, that stony ground with short, crisp crop that is the delight of those who seek the red deer. To-day there will be all the joy of watching them, spying them, with none of the possible horrors of a miss or a mess. They are here in masses, dotted all over the grassy places, among the rocks, stags and hinds of every size and sort. The stags look all head and ruffle, but lean and spare in the body and haunches after several amorous weeks; the hinds are strangely quiet and unsuspicious, as if knowing their lords and masters are not to be pursued, and that their own chase is not yet.

To go out shooting on rough deer ground makes one realise how strongly surefooted a stalker must be, for here was I to-day carrying my own weapon and having to keep my eyes

open, ahead and around me instead of devoting my sole attention to the rocky ground under my feet. How often have I blessed the fact that my stalker is weighted an extra 9 lb. with the rifle, as I, minus that weight, pant to keep close behind him.

When we reached the top of the ridge we expanded into line, walking about thirty yards apart, and took a turn northwards to the end of the corrie. Before long Donald's blunderbuss boomed out at a covey of four or five ptarmigan about fifty yards off, with no result except a proof they were not going to sit close. A little farther on a blue hare jumped up under my nose, which was quickly put in the bag. On we went, scrambling in and out of rocks and across big stones, till we came to the edge of the steep descent into the Sanctuary. Here is one of my favourite bits of the whole forest, looking into the very heart of the holy of holies, with all its charm and mystery of forbidden land.

I suggested we should sit a few minutes and have a spy. There was plenty to look at,

deer in every direction, and now and then a big bass voice reverberated through the silence, and our glasses raked every nook and corner to find the owner of the voice. But roaring was nearly at an end, and the corries no longer resembled the cattle-market they did ten days ago.

Stretching away below us, and opening out into a veritable plain, is the flat ground of the Sanctuary; rising all round, on the north, west, south of it, are the wild rocky faces and passes where the deer cross from one corrie to another. Opposite is the highest point in all the forest, below it far down to the right, is the road that leads through the wild "hills of Cona and Etha." Still more to the east lies an island sea of lochs, where one has spent many a dreamy, dawdling summer's day catching fat trout.

Hills and waters of the west, is any beauty of earth's to compare with yours? Is there aught that stirs the pulses as the kiss of your wild winds and the sound of your purling burns? Be one after deer or after ptarmigan,

this is the foundation of it all, the call of the wild, the yearning for the hills, the rest and strength they are to the heart that turns to them as the needle to the Pole.

My eyes dwell long on a mighty peak that cleaves the sky over yonder on a level with its twin neighbour, the pinnacle of the forest.

Only a few weeks ago, one hot September day, the Lady of Black Mount and I stood by the cairn that from here looks a pin-point on the crest. I had the rifle that day, and she did me the honour to come with me for the walk. It is a proud moment always for a pupil when the master eye comes to look on.

What a day that was, resplendent and gorgeous, and what a walk! Up and up, higher and higher ; the deer were on the move towards the highest ground, and we after them ; though it was rather like pursuing the end of the rainbow. If only we had been after ptarmigan the bag might have been heavy, for they rose close to us on all sides, sometimes in twos and threes, sometimes in large coveys ;

white flakes against the grey rocks and the dazzling sky.

The contour of that hill for a mile I am sure was nothing but rocks and stones, not a blade of grass or a clump of moss enough to feed a slug; no wonder the lumbering, fat stags ahead of us never stopped.

However, as we gradually panted nearer the skyline (coats having long since been discarded, and the sun beating down from his zenith), we crept from rock to rock and boulder to boulder, just in case of what we might happen on. But the deer had gone over the high pass down to the right of the cairn long before our snails' legs had reached it, and were making for the green slopes bordering the Sanctuary far beyond our ken.

We seemed to stand on the top of the world in that wild, rocky place; and apart from all sport and stags, it was joy and wonder enough.

My companion, in all her stalks and walks over the great fastnesses of Black Mount, had never been there before, which enhanced its charm to us both.

Mixed with the sense of rewarded effort and pleasure at gaining such a height once more together, there crept perhaps a faint breath of sadness as we each placed a stone upon the cairn.

"Shall we ever come here again, and together?" I know was our unuttered thought. Such days are rare; such perfect conditions of all outward circumstances, the beauty of earth and sky, the necessary health and fitness for such achievement, the freedom from care; these things lie in the lap of the gods, and are rarely given simultaneously to mortals more than once in a lifetime. But they were given to us that day, and deeply and thankfully we drank of the gift.

As we stood by the cairn, a curious effect of sunlight and cloud made the great corrie at our feet appear an unfathomable abyss, full of deep dark shadow into which penetrated not a gleam of light; on the farther side, on an absolute level with us, rose Clachlet, the highest point of all the surrounding "high tops." Suddenly from out the darkness below us shot a magni-

ficent eagle—it is rarely one is higher than he—soaring and wheeling into the light above; his home was doubtless among the sheer rocks beneath, where an ibex could not have obtained a foothold.

Behind us, by the way we had come, the ground lay in brilliant sunshine, and away far below the whole world was bathed in light.

Reluctantly, by degrees, we crept down towards the “lower lands of day,” where there were plenty of other deer, but the crafty wind having shifted a point or two to the north, which was bad for that beat, there was no luck for us in the way of a stag, though we did our best; however, we were far too filled with the splendours we had seen to mind.

As we drove home late that evening, after an excellent tea at the stalker’s house, we kept looking back, again and again, to where we had been. Corrie Bà and the encircling corries were dark with the shadows of the coming night, but our “mountain of vision” and its twin still glowed in the deep rose sunset.

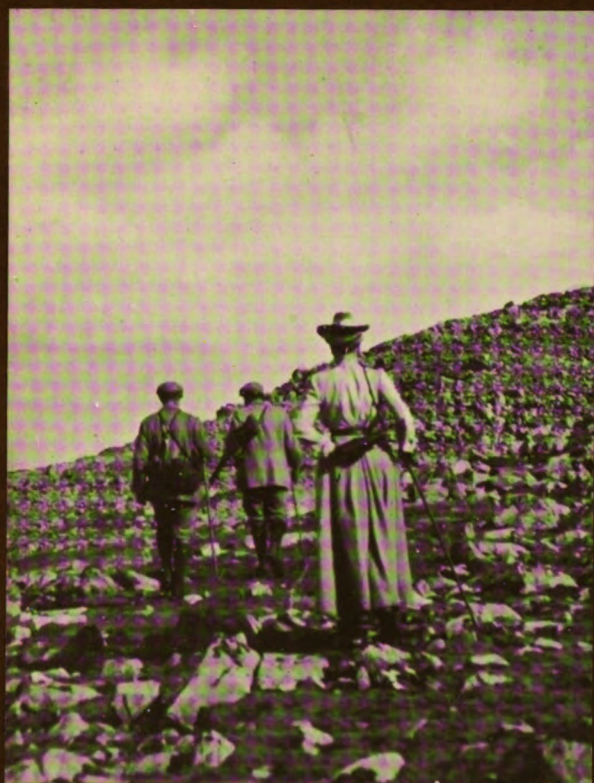


Photo by

HILDA MURRAY.

THE RIDGE OF PISGAH.

Had we really been there ? we asked each other, or was it all a beautiful dream ?

We named the spot Pisgah, and truly it fulfilled all that the imagination demands of a place from where the Land of Promise could be seen.

The words of God to Moses might have been said of that lofty height : " Get thee up into the top of Pisgah, and lift up thine eyes, westward and northward and southward and eastward, and behold it with thine eyes."

Was it not indeed a Land of Promise we viewed from there ? and not of promise only, thank God, but of much fulfilment. The Land of love and friendship, of faithful comradeship through the years, of happiness, of renewed health and powers of patient endurance, without which it were hard indeed ever to reach the true Pisgahs of life.

What matter that no stag was brought home that night, that the rifle returned as clean as it went out ? we had regained the heights, we had stood on Pisgah.

But to return to to-day. The first touch of

winter is on the hills ; a powdering of snow that crowns them with a diadem above their sapphire skirts. Stern too they look ; their summer smiles are put away, they know that winter is at hand, and no playtime is that with his rough, boisterous breath and swirling snow-wreaths. Yet surely they must love him too, friend that he is with his gift of sleep, his mantle of dark wherein all things rest, to live again at the touch of his child the spring.

So I sat, nibbling at my fancies and memories like a coney in the rocks, when suddenly my eye was caught by something white close by that seemed to disappear in a narrow cleft of a split rock. "Maybe it wass a hare," said Cameron. The fissure was narrow enough for a rat to have squeezed into, but Cameron's stick pushed into something soft, and as he peered down, sure enough there was a white, furry ball huddling about two feet down into its tiny cave. Poor brute, how frightened it must have been. I was glad there was no means of getting it out, so we left it in peace, and I wondered how long poor

pussy hare would remain in its rock fastness before venturing forth again.

We then retraced our steps ; by this time it was about one-thirty, and so far not a chance of ptarmigan had come my way. The best of the day was over, for gently and greyly an insidious mist began creeping in and around us which did not tend to improve our chances. Just before we sat down by a green velvet spring for our luncheon, a ptarmigan whizzed across me, going down wind like a streak of lightning ; of course I let drive, and of course I missed. However, I knew that the most likely ground still lay before us, so, after a hasty snack, off we went to work the southern face of the beat.

There was no further temptation to stop and spy for deer ; the mist had blotted everything but a few yards out.

How often on a brilliant September day had I been all over this ground when I could have knocked ptarmigan on the head with my stick as they ran chirruping among the stones, making that funny little noise that reminds one of children playing "Chuckie." But that is

when one is after deer ; to-day the birds are wild as hawks, and it is the deer that seem to be playing " Chuckie " among the stones.

We dared not draw far afield from each other now in the ghostlike mist, but we worked back and forwards, when luckily we saw two little friends silhouetted against the grey veil, squatting on a rock. Stealthily I crept nearer to within fifteen or twenty yards. - " Shoot, shoot," whispered Donald in my ear ; but no, my pride revolted at shooting my first ptarmigan sitting, so to Donald's disgust I waved my gun at them. Up two got, and down one came. " If Mistress Murray had fired her first shot before they rose she would have got both," was Donald's gentle reprimand, but Mistress Murray was so infinitely relieved to have got a ptarmigan on the wing at all that she accepted the rebuke with a beaming smile. We stalked another one (the bereaved mate I fear), but he never let us get near enough for a good chance ; twice I blazed at him, this time sitting as well as flying, to please Donald, but they were long shots.

The ptarmigan had their winter coats almost complete, and on the wing in the fading light against the grey they looked like snowflakes.

Seeing there was no more chance, and that if we were not to be benighted or bemisted we had better turn homewards, we gradually went down the east side of the hill, the opposite end to the way we had climbed up in the morning. We came on deer in every sheltered corner, and sneaked quietly by to avoid disturbing them, and so down into the "flats," across which we plowtered through long wet grass, in and out of peat hags and bogs, drenched from below and above, for the last hour and a half it rained as out of a tap; but that was small matter.

I for one, cared naught. I had snatched one more day of the hill. I had looked long and deep into the eyes of the North as I bade her *aufwiedersehen* before she sank into her winter sleep in the great silent corries; I had felt that strange stir of the heart at the wind's song of the hills. I had watched the deer, and I had got my ptarmigan.

CHAPTER IX
HUNTING.—I

**"WHEN Autumn is flaunting his banner of pride
For glory that summer has fled,
Arrayed in the robes of his royalty dyed
In tawny and orange and red ;
When the oak is yet rife with the vigour of life,
Though his acorns are dropping below,
Through bramble and brake shall the echoes awake
To the ring of a clear ' Tally ho ! ' "**
WHYTE-MELVILLE.

CHAPTER IX

HUNTING.—I

AT HOME

FEW people have perhaps had the luck to jump, so to speak, as fully armed into their hunting saddle as I did. To most it comes gradually, either from childhood or they reach it by degrees. Not so was my case.

I have ridden all my life, almost before I could walk, and though I spent many weeks of all my childhood and girlhood years at my cousin's place in the country of one of England's best and oldest packs, to take me out to follow hounds on a pony or horse never entered any one's head, not even mine till I had reached the respectable age of eighteen.

Then the great day dawned and my début in the hunting-field was made.

I was mounted on the most perfect hunter in my cousin's stables ; I have often wondered at his generous confidence in entrusting her to me—a tall brown mare of 16.2, with beautiful manners and jumping powers beyond description.

It is getting on for twenty years since that day, and I can best describe its joys and emotions by quoting two extracts from an old diary.

“ Tuesday, March 11, 1890. Went for a short ride with W. He on a polo pony and I on ‘ Judy.’ She is perfect, and jumps big enough to clear a house. Hurrah ! I am going to hunt to-morrow for first time, but I feel very sure as Judy knows all her business.

“ Wednesday, March 12. Oh, what a day I had ! The meet was at Haseleour, seven miles off. I got into the saddle at eleven and never got out of it till 6.30. We had three very nice runs ; one fearful long jog back to Statfold, then ran to Amington. We found in Thorpe gorse, and ran with a good many checks nearly to Measham. I followed K. R.

from about one o'clock, and then W. Judy carried me beautifully. It was just madly exciting, and I never enjoyed anything so much. There were a good many people out I knew, which added greatly to the enjoyment."

Such is the skeleton account of my first day's hunting, but my memory fills it out with plenty of stuffing and colour.

Well do I recollect how my kind and thoughtful cousin sent his second horseman out specially to look after me, and how he bade me follow a certain lady who he knew would lead me into no harm. Obediently I did so for the first hour or two, but when after one o'clock we found a fox who promised faster fun than the morning ones, and Judy and I had begun thoroughly to understand each other, my courage and confidence rose while my obedience evaporated. I then picked my own leader, a lady of bolder mettle, and the second horseman had more galloping and jumping than he probably expected.

Before long however, I found myself with my host's red coat as my pilot (though he was un-

aware of the fact), and to this day, I remember well the feel old Judy gave me as she hurled herself over one or two pretty stiff stake and bound fences. There were not many of the field at the end of the day, but I was one of them, proud and happy beyond words, above all at the look of approbation bestowed on me by one of England's best horsewomen ; and if that day ranks high as my first day's hunting, it does so still more as the starting-point of one of my life's best and deepest friendships.

Luckily we had only two miles home across the fields, though I was far too intoxicated with the day's success to feel fatigue. All the same, when dismounting in the stableyard after seven hours and a half of Judy's long stride and jumping powers, my body rather crumpled up. I knew all about it next day, but when one's bones and one's heart are young a few aches and pains are all part of the fun.

There was no more hunting for me that season, as a few days after I had to go farther south, but having "tasted blood" my one

idée fixe was to hunt again as soon and as often as chance offered.

My next experiences were abroad, which is a chapter by itself.

It was in the early spring of 1892 that came my next red-letter day ; once more I was mounted on Judy. My cousin had become Master of the Atherstone, in which country he lived, which to me enhanced the interest and glory of hunting tenfold, and I was all ears and eyes to pick up what lore and technique of the sport I could.

That day in February we happened to have one of the best runs of the season, beginning with as fast a fifteen minutes as any one could wish for, then a short check and another twenty-five minutes of the best, ran to ground and finally killed our fox. It was over a nice bit of country, mostly grass, with good, honest fences clean and upstanding, over which Judy carried me gallantly, right up in front. I understood then that hunting is the sport of kings.

But alas for the sequel ! I had not been

riding sufficiently to put me into the condition necessary to stand a long and hard day's hunting. To make a long story short, after various attempts to come out again, the doctor's mandate went forth "No more hunting," at which I bit a pencil in half from sheer rage. A few months afterwards my back was fired as a restorative to its overstrained muscles and nerves, so it is not horses' legs alone that require hot irons after hard days and breakdowns.

That was the end for some years to my hunting career at home, for after this disastrous ending my good cousins at Thorpe dared not take the responsibility of mounting me, knowing that my love of the game would break down all common sense and vows of good behaviour. On one occasion they did allow me to go out on a fourteen hand pony, when I galloped myself silly for about five hours, at the end of which time I saw three men on every horse and had the headache of my life; so that was no use either. As I did not seem capable of temper-



THE ATHERSTONE HOUNDS.

1894.

ance in hunting there seemed nothing for it but total abstinence.

Yet deep within my heart lay the taste of it, and the vow that with time and patience I would come to it again, possibly not in the full tide of the start but in a more moderate way ; and so it has been.

In the last few years, thanks chiefly to the care and thoughtfulness of spoiling friends, above all to the chatelaine of Thorpe, what with suitable horses, short hours, and common sense, added to stronger health, much of my secret resolve has been fulfilled.

There are many compensations in advancing years, and a more sedate enjoyment of hunting is one of mine. No longer does the sight of hounds whiten my face with excitement, though I still own to a bump or two inside me when standing at a covert side hounds give tongue, and one knows in another few minutes they will stream into the open and we after them. Who that has felt it will deny that there is a unique fascination in the sound and sense of galloping hoofs ; a

rhythm of movement, and a contagion of excitement in the first thunder of a gallop that is like nothing else? Undoubtedly there is an electric current between each individual rider and horse, but it also connects the riders and horses collectively as well.

In the first chapter of this small book I have ventured to say that hunting stands apart from all other sports in its primary object.

To the huntsman the aim is doubtless to hunt and kill his fox; possibly half a dozen of the hardest riders share the double object with him, but to the majority of those who come out hunting the object is to gallop and jump, and many of them would go on doing so just as happily if hounds were stopped and taken home, so long as they were unaware of the fact. Very few people hunt, though hundreds ride to hounds.

There is no prettier sight in the world than to watch hounds working, from the screaming pace to the slow hunting, checking, then casting themselves, picking up the line, turning, twisting; yet sometimes to me, a mere

onlooker at the game, with no pretence of knowledge or hard riding, it is a marvel how few people look at that side of it, or seem to know or care what hounds are doing or why.

This is a digression, and my object is rather to chronicle a few of my own small experiences and impressions than to enter into the ethics and philosophies of hunting. All the same, it is an enticing subject, and a truthful census taken of the question, "What is your object in going out hunting?" would be an interesting sidelight on human nature generally. A few answers would be to hunt and catch the fox; a large proportion to gallop and jump; a still larger to gallop and *not* to jump; still another lot to see their friends and coffee-house. My own answer is, to watch hounds hunt their fox, so long as the pace does not pump me nor the obstacles frighten me.

It may be utterly wrong, but to me it is a greater pleasure to be at the head of a slow hunt, where I can see hounds working, than in

the centre or tail of a fast one where I can neither keep up with nor see them.

The charge of cruelty, so often levelled at hunting, is I think, somewhat exaggerated. Firstly, of the many foxes hunted comparatively few are killed or die of exhaustion. A cub is bound to be very frightened for the first few times he is hustled, but an older fox, armed as he is with the slyest, cunningest instincts of any of our wild animals, is probably not often half as frightened as some of the people who ride in pursuit of him. The fear of the most terrified fox at any rate only begins with the hunt; the nerves of the timid pursuer may have started to quiver hours before, and continue doing so till they safely reach home again. Involuntary fear is bad enough, but voluntary terror is worse, for it dubs you fool as well as coward.

For the beaten fox before he is killed, or worse still, for the one who slinks into some hole or drain, exhausted to die, I have the profoundest pity, and I would that his pain were not the price of our sport; but compared

to the many foxes who give sport and are none the worse, pitting their clever wits against man and hound, let us comfort ourselves that for one who pays toll of terror and death at least twenty go free.

This also can be remembered in hunting ethics, as a further salve to our consciences, that the fox gets no worse than he gives ; in his hunting forays he deals more terror and painful life-taking than he in his turn meets with ; also he does not only kill to eat, but often for the love of it, as witness the many dead bodies in a poultry yard after one of Master Reynard's night visits. Therefore next day if he is hunted and harried even to the death, it is only carrying out that law of nature which, though it be not the highest ideal of moral philosophy, is one that rules the kingdom where man has not yet cast off the whole of his animal skin.

To kill an animal by instantaneous means is no cruelty. The beast or bird that dies in an instant by gun or rifle does so with no pain compared to what it would endure in the

natural process, or at the will of some animal of prey. To kill quick and sure is kinder than Nature's way of old age or lingering pain. In fox-hunting the only charge of cruelty that can legitimately be alleged is that of frightening and hunting an animal till he is caught, or dies from exhaustion, and the defence is that this happens comparatively seldom.

What a debt of gratitude and pleasure one owes to all the good horses that carry one. Their manners, their courage, their keenness, their cleverness are all the reasons of one's comfort and enjoyment, to say nothing of one's safety. The big brown mare who first initiated me into the joys of hunting, the steady old roan who of late years has brought me back to confidence and condition, the eighteen-year-old veteran whose cleverness is more than human, and who has carried his mistress since he was four and only given her two falls. The beautiful chestnut, granddaughter of Bend Or, to whom I was promoted but a year ago, the blaze-faced mare who gave me one of my best rides last season in a storm

of wind and rain—these and others pass before my mind's eye as so many good, true friends with whom I have spent many merry hours. The debt is twofold, for do I not in the first place, owe all my English hunting to the dear owner of these good horses? which further enhances their value to me.

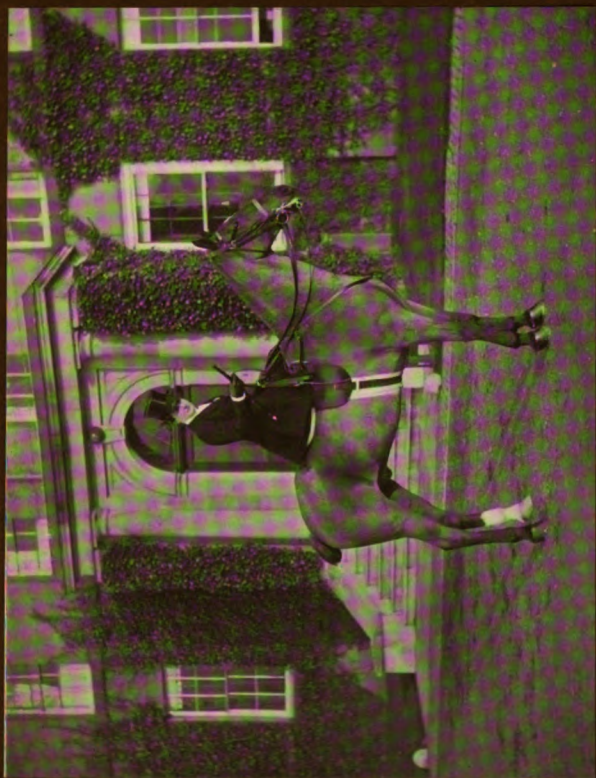
In his clever and interesting book, *England and the English*, Mr. Price Collier has a very pertinent description of the democracy of the hunting-field, and so I quote it here. "In England, his lordship, the parson, the squire, and the butcher, the baker, the candlestick maker, go galloping across the fields together after the hounds, and the best man among them is he with his head and heart up, and his hands and heels down, and a good one under him. . . . And one may see such a mingling of classes on terms of purely horsemanship equality as one seldom sees in America, and never in any country on the Continent of Europe."

So far my mind has run on fox-hunting in the Midlands, with its necessary corollary of

jumping, but there is another and in some ways a wilder kind of which I have, thanks again to the same source, had a delightful though short experience.

The New Forest is almost Irish in its love of sport. You can hunt something there six days of the week for a good many months of the year, but the deer hunting is of all the most exciting and fascinating. The depth of the woods, the rush of galloping hoofs down the splendid rides, the break into the open, the sense of pursuing an animal wild and free as the deer in his native haunt, combine to give an exhilaration and raciness in the blood that is not felt to such an extent in lawn-like and confined countries. There may be no jumping in the New Forest, but there is much to compensate instead. The risk of a broken neck down a rabbit-hole, a roll in a bog, a knocked head or foot against a tree, the uncertainty of galloping across heather and moorland, afford ample pinches of "danger salt."

One ride stands out foremost, and though descriptions of runs are boring except to those



THE STEADY OLD ROAN.

who were in them, I cannot forbear giving this one.

We had been hunting a fine buck in the woodland for over an hour. Pouring rain, water above and below ; the rides were sore, deep going. Back and forwards we galloped and splashed, covered with mud and water from head to foot, now checking and casting, then on again, round and round, up and down the rides, or cutting through trees and bracken for greater haste. Guided often by the sound of the horn, or listening in silence as they checked, then almost deafened by holloa and horn and hound, as once more they were hot on their quarry. Plenty opportunity was there here of watching hounds at work. Now and again we had sight of him, a small brown object, as he broke across a ride to disappear into a maze of trees and brambles. At last he was as sick of the woods as we, and took to the open with all of us hard after him. We three were well to the fore, thanks to her to whom I owe all my hunting, and who is always in the right place in the van ; in a few min-

utes we found ourselves close on the leading hounds, with only two men near us, streaming over that wild moorland with its heather and gorse, its hidden holes and pitfalls, as if it were the cream of a grass country. The wind and rain cut one slantways, the blood coursed in one's veins, every nerve and sense at concert pitch with the quick rush through the moor's air, that mounts to the head like wine. The horses felt it too. Nimble as cats over the rough bits, well into their bridles, stretching themselves out in the smoother places, they too loved it with us, and did their level best. For over three miles of moorland we galloped, till again the buck sought shelter in a belt of pines ; but not before one of us tasted something of the danger salt. As in the days of Rufus, trees can still bring to harm, especially if galloping between two narrow ones a horse turns by a hair's-breadth and one's right foot is caught and turned smack round. Such was the end of my ride, but no bones were broke, and though it crippled me for many weeks to come, one must pay toll some-

times. Besides which there are certain things in life for which it is worth to pay the reckoning after, and this is one, to ride the woods and moorland of the New Forest on a good horse, with kindred spirits, and hunt the deer.

If in time to come we can only add Exmoor to our hunting diaries, my cup of home sport will be full.

CHAPTER X
HUNTING.—II

**" Mes amis, partons pour la chasse
Du cor j'entends le joyeux son
Ton, ton, ton, ton,
Tontaine, ton, ton.
Jamais ce plaisir ne nous lasse,
Il est bon en toute saison,
Ton, ton,
Tontaine, ton, ton."**

MARION DU MERSAC.

CHAPTER X

HUNTING.—II

ABROAD

IF hunting at home has the best elements of sport, hunting abroad has all those of amusement. At home it almost ranks as a profession; abroad it is never more than a pleasure.

In the early spring of 1891, I spent some happy months in Rome.

We were a large party of cousins, all fond of riding, driving, and hunting, and some of the days we spent galloping and careering over the Campagna were the best of a very delightful time.

The Roman hunt in those days was extremely well managed, and as British as possible. An excellent English huntsman, a

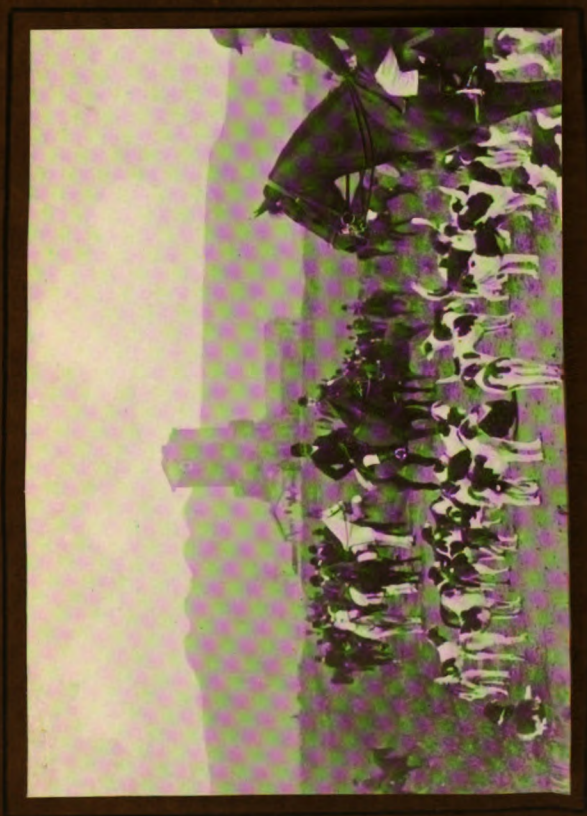
fine pack of hounds, and an Italian M.F.H. who was a real sportsman.

Foxes there were in abundance, and some of the best coverts were ancient tombs and ruins.

The meets were usually five or six miles beyond the walls, a luncheon tent was one of the features, and though it rather conduced to coffee-housing, it was all very amusing.

The going on the Campagna is the most perfect in the world; short, springy turf, rolling away like billows for miles and miles, firm and true, with very few holes or treacherous places, over which one can gallop at will.

The stiff grey post and rails, mostly three bars, are serious obstacles, from four to five feet high; they look harmless enough, and as if one could break them like matchwood, but they are made of the toughest vine wood, and if a horse breasts or knees them, he and his rider will come a very pretty fall, and the old grey *stazionate* be not a penny the worse. So stiff and unbreakable are they that a



A MEET OF THE ROMAN HUNT.

hatchet is carried by one of the hunt servants, as wire nippers are at home, and if a *stazionate* is too high and unbreakable, the top bar is knocked off, and the field have no false pride in jumping two bars instead of three. The only other obstacles are stone walls, fairly low, and as they are unmortared and rather like our Scottish dykes, they are not nearly so formidable as the post and rails, besides which they are all in one bit of country by themselves, so one had either a wall or a timber day.

Italian officers are ordered out to hunt to improve their riding and their eye for country. Moreover, they are obliged to hunt in uniform. Imagine a smart Lancer or Hussar officer in helmet or busby charging a black bull-finch at home ; the hunting-field would not boast of so many gallant thrusters as it does at present.

Some of these Italians, both soldiers and civilians, are fine riders and good sportsmen ; possibly their love and admiration for most things British have encouraged their sporting proclivities.

We had some good hirelings as mounts, though the ones that came out of the livery stables were rarely more than "two deckers" and followed the hatchet. The huntsman hired out a nice English hunter to one of my cousins, she being a first-rate horsewoman, and her brother got hold of another by name "Moses" who carried him well. I occasionally rode a little Irish chestnut mare, "Lady Ben," a chaser whose owner was trying to sell her; this was when I wished to go one better than the Italian hireling could manage.

The most amusing meet was at Cecilia Metella, the tomb of one of Nero's ladies, if my memory of Roman history serves me right. This was a very fashionable rendezvous, and all Rome came to it either on horseback or on wheels. The luncheon tent that day was in great request, and close beside the road was a stone wall, which the whole hunt had to jump, and any of the field who wished to get on to the Campagna at all and see any fun. All the smart ladies would step out of their carriages, and range themselves along

the wall to watch the success or discomfiture of their friends and acquaintances.

Worse still, rows of kodaks were also ready, and did you wish to have a true picture of what a fine rider you were in mid air, you had but to walk down the Corso a few days later, and there you might discover yourself in some shop window, looking like a bundle of old clothes, with coat-tails high behind and hands high in front, and plenty of daylight between you and the saddle. Lucky it was if you were only snapshotted on your horse, and not hiding behind the luncheon tent buttoning the safety skirt of those days. Nothing escaped those merciless kodaks.

The first over the show wall were the Master, hunt servants and hounds, followed perhaps next by the British Ambassador, as gallant and great a figure in the hunting-field as he was in all other fields of life—Lord Dufferin ; then a medley of Italian officers in their gay blue-and-black uniforms, sportsmen in red coats or mufti, and women of all sorts and shapes. Some would fly the wall, some

would almost bank it, others would get stuck up by it for the best part of half an hour, to the delight of the carriage and foot people, and above all of the kodaks. I remember an Austrian having a hideous scene. His horse wouldn't or couldn't jump, and he couldn't ride; finally he ended by losing his whip, stirrups, seat, and temper.

One famous ride I had on "Lady Ben" on the Cecilia Metella day. We found almost at once on the other side of the wall in some old ruins, and away we went. It was fairly level country, with a stone wall literally every hundred yards. There was a screaming scent, and Lady Ben found the pace much to her chasing taste. Her owner thinking thin reins suitable for a lady, had given me a bridle with reins like threads, that cut great welts across my gloves and hands. I could no more hold her than fly; luckily she never put a foot wrong, and we flew the walls as if they were phantoms.

I could hear my cousin thundering behind on old Moses, shouting to me to steady her



THE WALL AT CECILIA METELLA.

and pull her round. After ten or twelve walls at breakneck speed we got into a bit of country with a two-foot drain every few yards. Still Lady Ben tore on, and we did a sort of pitch and toss over the ditches. I did bless the fox for turning uphill then, and the hounds still more for catching him at the top. My wild career was thus at an end, and when the brush was fastened to my saddle and I had recovered my wind I thought it a glorious ride, which it was. That gallop steadied the little mare, and for the rest of the day she was lamblike, though to the best of my recollection she had not much chance of being anything else, as we did not do much more than potter about.

Besides hunting once or twice a week, we frequently rode as well. I know of no other going, unless it be the Australian bush, to compare with the Campagna. The velvety turf stretching like a green sea round one, the blue hills of Frascati and Tivoli on one side and Monte Serrato on the other, while far away rises the dome of St. Peter and the seven

hills of the beautiful mistress of the world. They say it takes seven years to know Rome, but to love her takes but a ride or two over her wonderful Campagna.

My other hunting experiences abroad were at Arcachon, in the south-east of France. A more artificial form of sport, but none the less amusing.

The quarry were bag foxes, though farther into the forests they hunt the wild boar. However, the distances were too far for us women, particularly as a great feature of the day was perpetually dismounting, and rider and horse slithering down great sand dunes like the side of a house. So our host would tell us on his return, possibly he foresaw having to continually help us on again; anyway he succeeded in discouraging his wife and me from going boar hunting.

There was quite a good pack of fox-hounds, the kennels being about three or four miles from Arcachon.

The M.F.H. was very smartly turned out, and was called *Maitre d'Equipages*. The

hunter, Jean, was an old Frenchman who I fear, occasionally had recourse to something stronger than *vin ordinaire*. He wore a very fine red coat with collar and cuffs of pale blue cloth trimmed with silver braid. With a gigantic brass horn round his body, on which he tooted all day long, he was the ideal of a French *chasseur*.

Dense, broad, and long as are the forests of the Gironde, there was no possibility of losing one's self so long as old Jean had any wind in his body. Not that his horn meant taking one to hounds, for his favourite place was at the rear of the field, but as we frequently ran a circle this did not much matter.

One of the hounds, by name "Fonglas," ran so much faster than any of the others that he was made to wear a heavy collar of lead to weight him. The Master and Jean were constantly calling out "*Ecoule, ecoule, Fonglas,*" which we supposed was the French equivalent to "Hark to, Fonglas"; so despite the leaden collar Fonglas always led the pack.

The foxes were kept in a large enclosure

near the Kennels. On hunting mornings one or two were taken out in sacks, and let loose about an hour in advance, when they were kept moving by two fat basset hounds until the pack came up.

The country people were given as much as twenty francs for every healthy fox they brought to the Kennels.

The forests are all for commercial purposes, being the maritime pines, valuable for their turpentine. On most of the trees hang small tin cups into which the pine slowly oozes its life-blood, but never long enough to kill it. The ground is very good and clean, the only undergrowth being broom and gorse, which in the spring makes a fine golden blaze against the brown needle carpet and the dark green overhead. Also there are hundreds of sand roads and tracks, which are beautiful soft going. There is no jumping except occasional *fossés*.

The only open country is the *Landes*, a sort of moorland covered with scrub and gorse bushes, and very wet and boggy in places.



Photo by

Don. Mrs. CHARLES STANBURY.

JEAN.

There one has no complaint of not jumping, for your horse jumps a different way every other minute, over the gorse or to avoid it, and one comes across innumerable ditches.

I well remember my first day's hunting at Arcachon. The meet was in the town, through which we rode in procession, headed by Jean and his horn blowing regular *fanfares*. The field numbered about fifteen or twenty, mostly French. The men in immaculate hunting kit of red coats, buckskin breeches, and top-boots, the English effect of which was a trifle feminised by white kid gloves.

There were three of us mounted on hire-lings, though my cousins had theirs more or less permanently, as they were living in the place for six months.

My favourite mount was a nice little brown mare Fille d'Or. The horses were decidedly better than the saddles, and this first day my saddle had no second pommel; however, I remedied this before we processed out of the town. Mercifully I did, for our fox led us quickly out of the forest into the *Landes*, and

I defy any one, short of an acrobat, to sit on a side-saddle and jump gorse bushes sideways, slantways, all ways, without a second pommel.

It came on to blow and rain, but no elements would keep one cool galloping across the *Landes*, and at the end of half an hour I was almost apoplectic with heat.

Bag foxes have strange ways. Another day we had been having a merry little gallop in the forest all round La Têche, a neighbouring village, when the fox headed straight for the main street, and disappeared into a barber's shop. The hounds followed hot after him, tearing in both at the front and back of the house; an excited Frenchman rushed out, his face covered with lather, a towel round his neck, followed by the barber, gesticulating wildly with a razor in his hand, both men shrieking, "*Le renard—le renard!*" at the top of their voices.

The fox had dashed into the shaving saloon, and there was safely ensconced. Even Jean had to cease blowing his old trumpet at this turn of events, dismount, and go in to whip

his hounds out of the house. When this was done a sack was produced, into which poor *Maître Renard* was entrapped somehow, and once more taken off to the forest, and let loose after a ten minutes' interval. But the poor beast was so stiff after all his adventures he was soon caught by the hounds, who, after being baulked of their quarry by the barber, were mad for blood. We couldn't help thinking that after all the sport and amusement he had given us, that fox deserved a present of his life, anyway for that day.

The best run I saw was one wet day when the field numbered five. Neither my host nor hostess were out, and I had a mount on the latter's horse, Sultan, a very nice hunter.

There was a good scent, and we ran right away, leaving poor Jean and the horn far behind. It was all through forest, till we reached the railway line, which we crossed somehow, and we killed our fox after a really fast forty minutes.

I was in at the death, that time honestly,

without my horse running away to get me there, and an Arcachon brush hangs on the wall beside the Roman one. We had a long eighteen kilometre ride home, but Sultan and I were too pleased with ourselves and each other to care. I had gone to the meet with some other English people, and we found our carriage at the Kennels. This was the usual rendezvous at the end of the day, where we had strange meals at a charming *auberge*, waited on by a smiling damsel Marie, who fed us on omelettes, oysters, shrimps, white wine and coffee, but all comes as grist to a hunting mill.

On days when there was no regular hunting, some daring amateurs would sometimes devise an impromptu *chasse*. Two young Frenchmen constituted themselves *Maîtres d'Equipages*, and the hounds were the street dogs of a neighbouring village. Pointers, poodles, Dalmatians, retrievers, terriers, and crosses between these and foxhounds, formed the pack. The inevitable horn was present, of course; and with such a crew a certain

amount of it came in very useful. We first paraded through the town to attract a few more riders to swell the field.

The bag fox on these occasions was generally taken out towards the forest on the sea-board, and we often had quite a good gallop over the sand dunes there. To their credit be it said that the street hounds not only hunted their fox well, but often caught him.

When nothing else was available we hunted paper. One paper chase ended disastrously, a young Frenchman was run away with and his head banged against a tree. Several ladies tried to bring him to, and the most efficacious way seemed to be by taking off his boots, and beating the soles of his feet hard. He must have been sore literally from head to foot for several days after, as it was afterwards discovered his leg was broken. He, however, eventually recovered from all his injuries and treatment.

Such are my most outstanding recollections of hunting abroad. Days full of sunshine

and pleasure, the memories of which to-day
bring back the happy yester-year.

“Quand on a terminé la chasse
Le chasseur se rend au grand rond,
Ton, ton, ton, ton,
Tontaine, ton, ton.
Et chacun boit à pleine tasse
Au grand St. Hubert son patron,
Ton, ton,
Tontaine, ton, ton.”

CHAPTER XI
A CAPERCAILZIE AND
AFTERTHOUGHTS

**"MEMORIES, images, precious thoughts
That shall not die, and cannot be destroyed."
WORDSWORTH.**

CHAPTER XI

A CAPERCAILZIE AND AFTER-THOUGHTS

It was glorious weather in mid January, and the fiat went forth that the next day we were to have a day's shooting up the lochside.

Our party were four men and two women, and we two latter chuckled at the thought of all the great things that might fall to our small guns, above all capercailzie and woodcock.

The voyage up the loch in the early morning was harbinger of the beauty of the day. Mighty trees gleaming and jewelled with hoar-frost, the water deep as sapphires, the hills still rose-crowned with the sun's morning greeting. The air crystal clear, tingled in the veins, and tuned the strings to concert pitch.

Arrived at our destination, we landed on

the north shore of the loch, under the giant Ben Lawers, who towered a snow sentinel of Himalayan-like outline high into the blue sky.

The lower hillside is there all covered with beautiful natural birch and oak woods, right down to the water-side. There are wide-cut rides in which the guns stand, and the game is driven mostly from east to west, or first one way and then another. Capercaillie and woodcock may come alternately, black game and pheasant, varied by snipe and partridges in the more open ground, to say nothing of occasional grouse, hares, and rabbits. In fact there is almost no species of game of these Isles that in the full shooting season may not be in the bag before night.

The other sportswoman (than whom no better and keener lives, and who excels in every branch of it, and in photography as well, as some of the illustrations of these sketches testify) and I were well spoilt, and given the easiest chances by being mostly posted at the tops of the rides, where consequently the birds came lower. A rowing boat

plied up and down close to the shore to "gather up the dead" out of the loch, as the keeper's wife tragically expressed it.

Naturally our chief ambition was to get a "caper" and a woodcock. We were doing fairly well with the pheasants that came our way, but my spirits were somewhat damped by missing two fair chances at woodcock. So far this elusive bird has been too quick for me. Does he always dip just as one fires? All the woodcock I have ever shot at invariably drop me a curtsey as they fly away. I have seen them in these very rides almost dip to the ground, as if they played at being hawks, making it impossible to even fire at them for fear of shooting one's neighbour.

As yet no caper cocks had come our way, though several hens had been allowed to pass unmolested by. To shoot a capercailzie hen is as great a sin as to shoot greyhen,—in fact the offence is greater, as unless they are very high, or the light is bad, they are so easily distinguishable from their large lords.

After lunch our kind host planted us in a

likely caper place, and came and stood himself beside me, to back up my twenty-bore with his larger twelve.

We were at the top, fairly in the open, just outside a lot of scrub, birch, and oak, and near some remains of old shielings. One or two pheasants came over, which were soon accounted for, and then, coming straight at me, I saw a large, flapping black thing. "A turkey cock," was my only conscious thought. "Shoot, shoot!" commanded my host's voice close to me. I obeyed. The black beast was right above me ; at my first barrel down he swooped, at the second a magnificent capercailzie cock lay dead within fifteen yards of me.

My delight was great, and I owed it all to my good host, first for putting me where he did, and then for bringing me to my senses by his order to shoot when I was prepared to stand gaping at my fancied flying bubbly-jock.

That was my first caper ; he will probably be my last, for caper cocks don't often come within such easy range of a twenty-bore gun as

my friend did. He stands to-day with all his magnificent tail feathers spread, and his dark green breast agleam, still in the line of fire, as a dining-room screen.

I longed for my other companion to do the same, but she scored her triumph by getting two woodcock, which as far as prowess went was far greater than mine : all the same, I wouldn't have exchanged trophies.

The bag at the end of the day was sixty pheasants, ten woodcock, four capercailzie, one rabbit—making a total of seventy-five.

The light was nearly gone as we wound our way down through the last mossy ride through the now silent woods, into the small boat which bobbed up and down in the swish-swash of the loch, and took us out to the little steamer which brought us home.

What a day it had been ! One of those that lingers fragrant in the memory and heart, throwing a strong light of brilliant reflection on to other days when the sun shines not and the mists hang low, when the hills are hid and the skies are grey.

In times of stress or sorrow it has been the recollection of such days and scenes that have come back and stood by me in the hour of need. The lighter incidents of actual sport fall from them like husks from the kernel, but the remembrance of the surroundings and of the friendship and comradeship of kindred spirits remain, lights shining in the dark days, holding out hands to cheer and strengthen the fainting spirit.

The love of sport is not altogether or necessarily merely the hunt after pleasure and the chase of an animal. It may and it ought to teach many a lesson that will outlive its actual pursuit. Patience, endurance, and courage should be the virtues of the soul that seeks sport, and perhaps its best aftermath is the laying up of these treasures of memory, deep wells of health and enjoyment, yes, and of achievement, to which one goes and draws deep draughts when one is in a dry and thirsty land where no water is. Then, no matter how arid the desert, how limitless the horizon of grey skies, down goes the

bucket into the well, and up comes the sparkling spring.

Once more one is standing surrounded by mighty hills, whose snow crests touch high heaven, bearing one's own heart thitherward ; the blue waters are at one's feet, the woods lie purple and green and brown around one, the stillness of the air throbs with the whirring of wings ; the grey to-day borrows for a moment the gold of yesterday, and one turns back to the daily task or the uncongenial duty strangely refreshed and quietened by the vision that neither time nor place can take away.

Therefore, if the true keynote of sport be attainment, its best result is the memory of happy, healthful days, be they among the wild corries or in the stir of a gallop ; in the reflection of silver waters or among the heather and woods,—sometimes in solitude, or, better still, with a twin soul. The actual fades, the remembrance remains to echo glad music down the years.

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